

THE WISDOM OF LOVE

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JAKOB SCHAFFNER
THE WISDOM OF LOVE

Translated from the German

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What God hath joined together, death itself
cannot part

THE WISDOM OF LOVE

CHAPTER I

NOWHERE do men feel the wonder and exhilaration of Spring as in a great city, and in no city is her glory so amazing and stimulating as in Berlin. The long rows of lofty houses turn green as if by some hidden magic, the first flowers appear on the balconies, the chestnut-trees bordering the busy streets put forth their buds of glistening gold, the front gardens are gay once more with the deep purple of flowering lilacs, blackbirds begin to sing from the roofs, and the parks are again filled with children and birds amongst all the tender green of opening leaves—all this not only fills the heart of a Berlin citizen with ecstasy, but sometimes, too, so intoxicates him that he loses himself in excesses of a less exalted nature, quite as often as in a sense of bliss and overwhelming gratitude. He becomes less phlegmatic, throws off his overcoat and rushes about his business in tearing haste as if afraid to miss all the spring marvels; suddenly he begins to shout and fight, throws himself with passionate eagerness into the last of the winter amusements no less than into the first new joys of spring, buys flowers for his sweetheart—no other city can show such wealth of blossom both in the florists' shops and in the flower-sellers' baskets—joins those of his fellow-citizens who flock in large numbers to the few places that serve beer and coffee outside the building, and there he will sit half-shivering for hours amongst attenuated oleanders and imitation palms in the noise and dust of the streets, either looking out for adventures or thinking over life as it affects him, so that he goes to bed late, discontented or unstrung, and gets up to all the tempting sunshine and the buds and blossoms of the following morning, only to pursue with a tired body or overstrained nerves the dreary round of his artificial occupations carried on in the bare, dark places of this great and intricate molehill. There, to the accom-

paniment of the shrill telephone bells, the tap-tap of the typewriters, the rattle of the shop tills, telegrams fly hither and thither, postmen pass with hasty steps, vehicles and electric trams rolling along the streets vie in number with the underground trains beneath. The cars on the elevated railway of smoke-blackened brickwork rising to the level of the tree-tops carry their daily freight of tens of thousands of hurried, anxious, heavy-laden passengers past all the marvels of the Tiergarten¹—a glimpse, a fleeting scent—and the train dashes on once more amid walls, streets, chimneys and towers.

Here and there one may catch sight of one of these nervous, worldly-wise men as he stops short and casts a thoughtful, wondering glance at his surroundings. It almost seems as if he were considering them from a different point of view and making up his mind to free himself from all the demands made upon him by his unnatural life and to become from that hour a man in very deed; but then a cloud passes swiftly across his face, a strained look of excitement and unrest, and he pursues his hurried course once more. His features assume their expression of cool but eager calculation; in another moment he is disputing the fare with his driver, tearing as if to save his life to catch a train just starting on the Underground, although the next is due in another three minutes; his day passes in hot altercation with another business man over some trifling profit or in sharp rebukes to his underlings, and to all this he gives the name of life and success.

¹ Tiergarten—the beautiful west-end park of Berlin.

CHAPTER II

ON just such a spring day when hearts and passions are alike touched and roused, Frau Meta Felgentreu was dressing to go to church, for it was Sunday. She belonged to the so-called old natives of Berlin, came of good middle-class stock, was the wife of a factory overseer, bore her forty-five years with dignity and grace, and had never once since her marriage missed this Sunday pilgrimage—and this, too, without any trying display of temper or neglect of home or husband, for which, indeed, even supposing that such things had been possible, she would never have forgiven herself, since duty in her eyes was a very serious matter. Perhaps she was superstitious, or perhaps, too, it was a slight sense of insecurity that made her cling with every fibre of her being to the joy which had not come to her so early as to many. Possibly that was the meaning of the various horse-shoes that, for some purpose or another, she had put up in all kinds of places in the flat, one over the entrance door, one on which hung the keys in the kitchen, one as a coffee-pot stand in the living-room, and another—silver-plated and adorned with yellow ribbon—on which Felgentreu used every night to hang the gold watch that she had given him on their wedding-day.

Their bedroom, where Meta was dressing, was full of the spring sunshine that transformed the white muslin curtains into forms of filmy brightness, brought out the brilliance of the mirror farther back, danced on the striped wallpaper, on the horse-shoe, on the brown wooden cupboard and on the two bedsteads. And more than all this, its kindly beams showed to the husband—a tall, fair man in house slippers and sucking a fairly long pipe with a certain relish—how sturdy, neat and youthful this wife of his was.

Her bare arms were still young and rounded, her neck

and shoulders showed signs of health and strength, and with her abundant light-brown hair and large grey eyes that flashed back their light from the mirror, she looked in her pretty white garments a creature that could still arouse love and return it; no one, indeed, would have thought her more than forty, the exact age of her husband, who this morning was hovering round her full of fresh ideas and quite ready to tease his wife a little.

"Don't tittlewattle so much, Meta, when I know you are going to meet other men," he admonished as he stood behind her, puffing at his pipe. He was a good half-head taller than his wife and remarkably fair, in every sense of the word a fine bold, upstanding man who enjoyed at home no less than abroad an irreproachable reputation, brown-eyed, well-read, as good-humoured as he was restless, continually changing, yet always the same; now, moreover, he had already shaved and donned his white shirt, though he still lacked a collar, and his brilliant crop of ruddy hair had so far not renewed its acquaintance with brush and comb.

"It really hurts my eyes." His voice betrayed a note of reproach. "I am not exactly sure—there might be something disloyal about it. There you still go on hidden paths—who knows whither? One of your hairpins has dropped. Is someone thinking of you?"

He picked it up and handed it to her, and with a serious look in his eyes, as he passed from jest to earnest, he asked: "Tell me, wouldn't you like for once to spend a Sunday morning with your husband? I would get a little sociable breakfast for us two, some red meat minced up with egg and onions, sprinkled with pepper and salt, and a tiny glass of port as well—now that would be pleasant, surely. Then we could talk a little about old times; it is always nice to have a chat with you. Do you know, I often miss something of this kind on Sundays like to-day? It's the beautiful weather. Haven't I the canaries? Yes, it's

true I manage to pass some hours looking after them, but there would be time for that afterwards. Other husbands have things differently and don't realize their blessings. Heavens alive! I tell you, wife, a week of money-making is often very wearisome. And the spring gets into one's bones—as if to make one wish the old courtship days were back again. You are still a pretty, attractive wife, Meta; there's no denying that."

She blushed a little as she put on her under-bodice, for until now she had stood there in her corsets.

"What remarks you do make when you have the time!" she answered with a laugh, yet not untouched by the look, so unlike that of a staid married man in its boyish admiration and the thwarted longing with which he paid homage to the unconscious charm of her body, almost as though it was still a miracle of creation that he did not fully grasp.

"Never mind now; we shall no doubt get the spring out of our bones again. This afternoon we'll go to the Tiergarten and in the evening you will take me to Siechen's, in the Potsdam Platz. And I will come with you once more to your wineshop. And as to church, Emil, how would it be if you put on your collar and shoes and came with me instead of my staying with you? You see, a Sunday without church—I should feel as if I had no real support to help me through the week. The sudden break in my habit would quite upset me. But it would be a great joy to me to know you were sitting beside me in the pew. Moreover, it's Easter to-day, and this is when we must celebrate our first glance of mutual love. Do you remember, Emil?"

"Of course; that's what I say," came his eager reply, accompanied by an emphatic wave of the long pipe. "What other old times do you think I want to talk to you about? Now, Meta, you just put on your pretty jumper with the red spots and sit on my knee by the window; and then you can take a puff or two at my pipe, and I'll

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take a drink from your glass with the pleasant feeling that once in a way I count for more than the pastor. Don't despise it, Meta. I'll fetch you your jumper."

"No, no, never mind the jumper, Emil, my boy," Meta replied, as she took up the dark silk blouse; the friendly tone of her refusal, however, could not altogether hide the anxiety she always felt in any discussion of this nature, for here lay her disputed right. "Fortune doesn't smile on our being together this morning." And she went on almost sadly: "There are people who have known me for years and years at church and still think I am a widow—and if I laugh and say I have a live, fair-haired fellow of a husband they look at me in amazement. As a matter of fact, Emil, you only know one side of my life and I only one of yours, although, indeed, I have a better idea of what you are in the factory than you can have of what my church is to me. You come home and forget all the work you have left behind, but, Emil, I forget nothing. Yet—all the same, dear Emil, we will begin our celebration to-day. When I come back from church I have got a surprise for you, and you can spend the time till then in thinking what it is."

Her blouse being now fastened, Meta looked at him affectionately, and Emil realized his defeat, although not, indeed, without a certain rebellious feeling of indignation; a touch of peevish annoyance mingled in the high esteem which he really felt for his wife as he murmured sulkily: "You can't give me any surprise greater than what I felt ten years ago for the worth of your character—unless, indeed, you climbed up on your own head, and there possibly you would find a dizzy outlook. What's the festive fare for to-day?"

"Grumbles in one cheek and praise in the other," she laughed as she put on her black skirt. "Just fetch me my shoes; they are in the kitchen. Alma has forgotten to bring them back."

"The order shall be passed on," he said somewhat petulantly as he stepped to the open door and called out: "Alma, please bring along our lady's shoes!" Then he sauntered into the parlour, where she could hear him begin his Sunday occupation of attending to his canaries.

Alma, a well-grown pretty girl of about twenty, Frau Felgentreu's niece, and at first sight the living image of her aunt when younger, appeared with the shoes. But the likeness was at first sight only, for even a superficial comparison disclosed fundamental diversity in many respects, and as soon as she spoke she stood revealed as an entirely different being. Just as her colouring was distinctly darker than Meta's, her qualities, too, seemed to be of more pronounced and violent a character. She, as well as those around her, had to fight continually with her own headstrong nature and a tendency to a certain quarrelsome irritability inherited from her mother—a tendency that had made her a most difficult child to manage and tried Meta's patience almost to breaking-point. But since she made up for these failings by affection and other sterling qualities, and had, moreover, grown into a fine young creature with every prospect of a successful future, Meta felt she had her reward, and the foundations of a good mutual understanding were already laid between the two women. Now Alma stood and watched her aunt as she buttoned up her shoes.

"I have half a mind to come with you in this lovely weather," she remarked, looking out of the window with eyes full of youth's keen desire for life. "But now I shall never catch you up, so, perhaps, a little later I will just run over to the Lippkes; they are going this afternoon to Potsdam, and I don't know by what train. And anyway you would rather go alone with uncle."

"Much you know with whom I would rather go alone," was Frau Meta's mocking reply, but she looked by no means ill-pleased.

"You can tell Clara Lippke that she must bring back the frock pattern I lent her—or how are we to get your summer frock made this week? You girls are very smart and fashionable, but not so particular about tidiness as you might be. Have you moved the buttons on your blouse so that it does not fit so tightly?"

"It doesn't fit so very tightly," her niece answered in some confusion; "and even if it did, they are worn like that now." She blushed a little, and began arranging her hair. "Your new hat, too, is very pretty. Do you want to make a favourable impression on God?"

"It wouldn't do your impertinence any harm if you got such an acquaintance through me," Frau Meta answered, with a last critical glance in the looking-glass as she turned her steps with calm dignity towards the parlour. "You won't have got over all your difficulties even if the Lippkes do invite you to go to Potsdam, although young Lippke has got a situation as dispenser. And anyway I want to tell you that to-day is the last time you go to the Lippkes until they have been here, as is but fitting. You may ask them over to coffee for any afternoon you like. After all, we Felgentreus are no mere upstarts, so let the folk show themselves to me. Good-bye, Emil. Have you any message for God on this anniversary day?"

"You might tell Him not to let so many birds die this year," Felgentreu replied, wrinkling his brows as he bent anxious eyes on an ailing little hen-canary. "If they do, it is no use breeding them, and I would rather spend the time having a morning drink."

"I'll give your message," she answered with a sharp glance in his direction. "It would be a pity for us all, after you have dropped those morning drinks for so long."

And now the old cock-bird, who always led the chorus and never failed to respond to Frau Meta's deep melodious voice, broke into a flood of song; a young bird eagerly joined in at once, and a sudden chorus of rippling melody

arose from all the little wooden cages. Accompanied by the notes of the gay little songsters, Frau Meta, hymn-book in hand, left the sitting-room and the flat.

No sooner was she gone than Felgentreu heard the first Easter chimes float through the open window, and, contrary to his usual custom, he broke off in the midst of his activities, took a meditative pull or two at his pipe, and then began to pace restlessly up and down between the bed and sitting rooms. The birds stopped singing and subsided into inquiring chirps amongst themselves, whilst the white curtains danced joyously—well-nigh riotously, indeed—in the draught, as if determined to take advantage for once of the mistress's absence.

In front of the bedroom window stood a flower-table gay with cyclamens and hyacinths of Frau Felgentreu's own growing; the sight of them, standing so quietly with faces turned towards the sun, increased the sense of loneliness bordering on jealousy that always overwhelmed Emil when he was compelled by Meta's absence or a passing want of harmony between them to look for a substitute and some other diversion in his home. The flowers never responded to his advances; throughout the flat, where, indeed, under no matter what conditions, material and mental alike, the whole atmosphere was but the unmistakable expression of Meta's character and influence, there was nothing that showed such faithful, and absolutely fanatical, devotion to her as did her plants. Her husband often almost hated them, although he continually brought her from time to time cuttings of an especially choice geranium or fuchsia that he had seen at some acquaintance's, because he remembered how pleased she was to get them. Her curtains, too, in the flat, were not without their influence as far as he was concerned; there was something seductive and false about them, especially when they tossed and flew up in the wind as they did to-day—something that excited him and

aroused his masculine love of adventure; although when he sat at the table with Meta, reading his evening paper whilst she sewed, they hung in discreet and orderly folds at the windows, looking as if it would be quite impossible for the sight of them to arouse any unlawful ideas.

Now, too, it was they, and they alone, that responded in any way to those spring sensations of his; even his birds, on whom he had expended such care all through the winter, were now quite indifferent to him and annoyed him with their futile hopping and chirping.

But suddenly there rang out from the kitchen other notes that at once commanded his attention. He had often before heard Alma sing without being particularly struck by it; he had had many a joke with her and many a tussle too, either over some object that both wanted or when they were enjoying a little rough frolic, but it had never been anything more than the natural play between uncle and niece. Yet now she was singing the little frivolous operatic air, "That's What the Young Girls Love," with so much assurance and in a voice so plainly revealing her own ripening desires that he took the pipe which was really too old and staid for him from his mouth, and with his lips still parted bent his head to listen to her. A smile that took years from his age passed across his face, and his brown eyes, that expressed such warmth and imagination, now flashed with the light of enterprise. His wife's curtains, too, continued to blow about and to suggest secrets that they did not contain. Quite involuntarily, but most opportunely, his mind reverted to the women's conversation in the bedroom about the too-tightly-fitting blouse and to the fact that he had himself noticed how the girl's figure had developed in the past year. At last, as though carried on by some irresistible current, he began in his embroidered slippers to move towards the kitchen.

There he found Alma working away with chalk and

benzine at her white shoes, which she was trying to make still whiter. Through the half-open door of her bedroom he could see a white lace-trimmed petticoat laid out on the bed beside a pair of long stockings and a thin, filmy muslin dress. He got a sudden distaste for his tobacco, and letting his eyes wander over the neck-opening of her long-sleeved apron, which for convenience' sake she was wearing to-day over her petticoat-bodice, he began to talk to her.

"Well, now, tell me, Alma, what about the things young girls love?" he said, with a smile. "Do you know anything more about them, eh?"

The spring breezes were moving the white curtains in the kitchen too, but here they fluttered like flags, and in a more maidenly and bridal fashion. The sunshine fell in a slanting fiery beam across the pretty girl from behind, so that everything about her lay in strong light and shade and still further increased the impression which she gave of strength and determination. Her hair, that at other times looked dark, now had a golden shimmer; a few locks, straying over her sun-kissed cheek, were so fair as to be almost invisible, and a delicate down seemed to tremble in the breeze, whilst the soft growth at the nape of her neck only threw a slight shade on to the whiteness of her throat. Chin and nose, the self-willed line of her straight eyebrow and the little green stone in her ear, which she had forced her aunt to give her, all stood out in the bright light, whilst her eyes, with their secret gleam, lay in deep shadow. When she raised her head, however, everything was totally changed; a sunbeam fell across one eye, and her mouth, with the red lips and white teeth, shone with unwonted brightness amidst all the other flashing points of copper and glass in the kitchen.

"No doubt you know more about them," she answered, with a laugh. "Why ask me?"

"Why ask you? Because you are a girl yourself," he

explained, as he stepped a little closer, whilst there was something akin to reverential worship in his eyes as their hunger and thirst for beauty they traced the line that passed from her rounded chin across the white neck to lose itself between the close curves of her breasts.

"You see, I know nothing about such things—my wife was my first acquaintance."

"You've no doubt told that to many a one before me," she mocked in the somewhat brusque way peculiar to her.

"Well, I may have had two or three before," he agreed, and prepared to do a little bragging for her benefit. "It may perhaps have been half a dozen," he said, proud as a peacock, with a wink in his eye. "But every one is different. Even if you know a hundred or even two hundred, number 201 may have such an aroma that you feel you have never before known what a girl or woman really was. It's a pity everything has to come to an end. There's no full satisfaction in life."

"You ought to be ashamed, uncle, to say such a thing," Alma said reprovingly, looking attentively at her shoes meanwhile. "You certainly have no cause for complaint; you might search the world over for such a wife as Aunt Meta. If she does set store by her church, what harm does that do to you?"

"That's not exactly what I meant," he went on to explain. "You see, now and again I get a fit of restlessness, for when all is said and done that's not the only thing that comes to an end here. Eating, drinking, smoking, taking a walk, love, spring-time, music—all of it ends some time for us. And even if the blackbird does sing summer after summer on the roof for ever and ever, each of us will hear it only for his allotted span; then it will come to others, whilst we lie in the grave. And those who follow us will have to leave everything in exactly the same way. And it's just the same with wives. I've been faithful to mine; no one can deny that. She has a straight, upright

nature, not like the ordinary run, and that's exactly why she oughtn't to run off to the preacher, just to-day, the anniversary of our betrothal. Would you run away if your husband wanted to hug you for an hour, and to church of all places? Now, tell me, Alma, what would you do in such a case?"

"Why, stop for the kissing, of course," she laughed. "The church would be nothing for me. But, then, I'm different, uncle. And Aunt Meta is not always at church, and you often have a good time with her, too."

"That's true enough, Alma, clever lass. Only you don't know quite everything, I can tell you. Sometimes for a long time I can go shares with God quite contentedly, but then I grow desperate, for He is eternal and I'm but mortal. And the hour for kissing won't be made up to me. Or do you contradict that, Alma? Will it or will it not?"

"What questions you do ask!" she answered in sudden embarrassment and already on the defensive. "Those are questions for married people, and I know nothing about it."

"Questions of love, Alma," he answered earnestly. "Marriage is only the cloak; pull that off and all the other coverings as well, and underneath there ought to be a wholesome, sturdy love to rejoice one's heart. But when there's for ever a hymn-book in the hand and a cross round the neck! Well, there's an end of the whole business! Sometimes, I think to myself, if things had been different I'd have come to ruin with drink and women. I'll tell you what, my girl. I've been a deceiver, a hypocritical simpleton and nothing but a pious humbug when the bells ring on Sunday mornings. I don't know how it is, but for months I've been tormented with the idea that the whole thing about the bank is a swindle, an indefensible make-believe. I tell you, we've 15,000 marks in the savings-bank. What am I going to do with it? It doesn't belong to me! I turn my back on the money,

go off into the wide world, and nothing is changed in me myself. What's the result? Have you any idea? I haven't. Hang yourself, Emil, and then you'll be out of everyone's way. To-day Meta told me that there are people who have been at church with her for years and think she is a widow. They all go the same way every Sunday, like clouds in the sky; just see one another, but know no one more than that, and each of them thinks: "There's that fine-looking woman again!" "The gentleman with the beard is beginning to age." And suddenly one drops out, is dead, departed in the fear of the Lord! That's her world, Alma."

The girl had lost all inclination to laugh and her sense of innocent security, too. She had pulled her overall up closer round her throat, and although as he talked he had moved so that she could no longer feel oppressed by his close proximity, yet she breathed more quickly and hastened to finish her work so that she could take refuge in her bedroom. She was one of those young Berlin women who attach much importance to propriety and hope to make their career on, so to speak, clean business lines. It is true they mean to catch the man by their personality, but in seemly wise, and they object to any disturbance of their calculations. Alma had grown a little paler, and her features betrayed some inward agitation.

"You really oughtn't to talk like that to me, uncle!" she said at last, somewhat uncertainly and without daring to lift her eyes. "If Aunt Meta was here you wouldn't think of it."

His eyes flashed, whilst his lips parted in a good-humoured smile, which, however, did but increase her uneasiness.

"We've had enough of the 'uncle' business, Alma," he promptly and eagerly replied. "Now, I suppose you are frightened of me, aren't you? All at once there comes a man with no embroidered slippers or long pipe, and

holds out all the secrets of his heart to view, a thorough-going vagabond, no doubt, a free-thinker, a humbug and good-for-nothing. Devil take it!" In a fury he dashed his pipe to the ground and kicked it so that one worked slipper flew off of its own accord.

"There's nothing more contemptible than this disloyalty in thought," he cried excitedly, and fired off his second shoe after its fellow. "You'll soon see a crash that you didn't expect. Look here, I'll tell you something—the whole business is the result of her money; without that we should have been nothing to one another."

With his flashing eyes, shining white teeth, and fair hair that seemed aflame in the sunlight, he appeared most seductive to Alma, but that only moved her to be more on her guard.

"I don't know if it's the effect of the lovely bright spring sunshine," he went on, "but I feel as though I had never really seen you before to-day. And this is the anniversary of the first loving glance between Meta and me. Tell me, have you felt that, too, with your virtuous dispenser? For, my girl, if you don't have the joys of the senses soon and in full measure, what else are you going to cling to in this life? In the twinkling of an eye you'll be a staid wife and mother; such women put on all their grand airs and pride of position simply because they've somehow managed to get a proper bed and board. You've made your white shoes beautifully clean—do you think you'll bring them home again as spotless?"

As she stood in the radiance of sunshine and of her own blushes, the very embodiment of beautiful, lovable young womanhood, she might well have made an impression on men of calmer and less emotional temperament, and Emil was now in a state of great agitation, with his passion roused to fever-heat, although he laughed carelessly, rocking a little from side to side. Alma cast a stolen

glance of scrutiny in his direction to find out, if possible, what she had to fear from him.

"I don't know; let me pass," she said at last with annoyance. "I've finished and want to dress."

"Well, I'm not in your way. The door is open," he answered, as he bent his head in its direction. "Are you frightened to pass me, all at once? You have gone nearer to me a thousand times before this; what has made such a difference all at once? Tell me, Alma!"

"Nothing at all," she said somewhat breathlessly; and, casting a glance of vexed defiance at him, she made a hasty attempt to reach the door of her room. Whether her evident hostility spurred him on to the attack or not, the unpremeditated happened. All at once she lay in his arms without any show of resistance or even a word as she felt with an inner trembling his kiss upon her lips. When she did not make use of her first chance to escape, and he noticed her pallor and other signs of her submission, Emil lost all self-control. At last, breathing heavily and quite intoxicated by the scent and touch of her body, he loosened his grasp of her, laughed and felt in his usual way for his pipe. But Alma still remained pale and dazed as she put up her hands mechanically to tidy her hair, and with a look of confusion and overpowering gloom went slowly towards her room. On the threshold she cast a strange, uncertain glance at him, and without answering the laugh in which he was still indulging, she said in mingled anger and acquiescence:

"Well, you are a beauty!"

CHAPTER III

WHILST all this was happening, Frau Felgentreu, with calm self-composure, was following the church service for herself and her husband, without whom the whole world

was naught to her, and through whom she enjoyed the full development of her life as a woman. During the sermon her thoughts flew homewards oftener than usual; for a time, indeed, she quite forgot where she was, and only remembered that this was the season of their first love-making, with a half-regret that she had not granted his request and stayed at home. It is doubtful, however, if these questions would have so disturbed her had her favourite preacher occupied the pulpit that day. It was true that the discourse was being given by the *Superintendent* himself, but no title whatever held sufficient glamour to make her consider a poor, empty address edifying, although she always listened to the gospel messages with all due reverence.

Meantime, however, her thoughts persisted, with an affection that would brook no denial, in living through once more the ten years she had passed at her husband's side, and found all good and well worth the necessary sacrifices. For small worries continually occurred and upset her more than she would ever show. There were, moreover, in her character depths and currents of which those around her knew but little, and seldom even guessed, but she considered it her duty to a less steadfast nature to be the unfailing, strong foundation on which their life in common could rise to a strong, stately building. All her love and inner tenderness for her husband, moreover, did not prevent her knowing that not only the happiness of their marriage, but his whole prosperity as a man and citizen depended upon her. In this her thoughts and feelings were those common to all fine women who, coming in later life to a younger husband, find in him that which at once rouses and satisfies their maternal longings no less than their wifely desires, and since there were no children of the marriage, he became entirely her big boy. If she erred in this respect, it was, indeed, through no lack of true-hearted affection. Even her church life, which

she followed without him and, to a certain degree, against his will—for which many blamed her—was for her principally an insurance which she took out, so to speak, on the divine omnipotence and mercy for the success of their marriage and the welfare of her husband. For, in spite of her outward composure and stability, she was never entirely free from hidden anxiety on his account.

After one more earnest and comprehensive prayer for her husband's body and soul alike, she left the church and turned her steps homeward, fully determined to make ample compensation to Emil for the festive morning hour of which he had been deprived. A quiet smile played round her lips, that were apt to close a thought too severely, and the eyes, that looked so deeply into the will of God and the weakness of man, were filled now with the light of kindness and a silent longing for love.

Thus she came home to find the flat empty. Still holding her hymn-book in her hand, she went through all the rooms, found the broken pipe on the kitchen floor, noticed one woolwork slipper under the sink by the floor-bucket and his work with the birds in the sitting-room left only half done; on the table there stood one little wooden cage, and in the others the birds were showing quite unwonted activity. In their bedroom the second slipper was lying by the bed in company with collars and ties tossed on to the floor in slovenly fashion, not at all in accordance with her husband's usual tidiness.

She quietly put away her hymn-book, took off her hat and prepared to go into the kitchen. There she found that Alma had forgotten to mend the stove; the fire was out, and Meta, not feeling inclined to lay it again, lit the gas, although it went against her sense of economy to do so. Later on Alma came back from her call without having asked about the dress pattern, nor had she given the invitation to coffee. She seemed worried and dispirited, and when Emil appeared for dinner in Sunday exaltation

after his morning drink, she studiously ignored his looks and words. In contrast to her, Emil seemed noisier and livelier than ever, requiring twice his usual amount of elbow-room and more time for his jokes. The wine that he dispensed in commemoration of their first look of mutual love was not untouched, it is true, but at first he was the only one to drink, until Alma suddenly emptied her glass and pushed it forward to be refilled; after that he found a good partner in her. Gradually, too, she warmed up to his jokes, since she was too young and lively to withstand the effect of good food and wine for very long. Meta drank slowly, with a thoughtful look in her eyes, whilst her husband always had a slight feeling of suffocation whenever he remembered the events of the morning; at last, however, he seized his glass and saved the situation with a toast to her and to the first look of love exchanged between them.

"That first look of love falls on the human soul like a ray of sunshine in a smoky chimney; if you look in it, you see wonderful shapes and happenings, and nobody knows what is real and what isn't, and"—he continued his harangue—"the mistress in the kitchen thinks the sun won't let the fire burn and the meat doesn't cook; but what does a roast matter compared with the blessed sun of heaven? Men attach far too much importance to eating and drinking! No, no, Alma, my girl, you needn't laugh; I mean what I say. The main thing is sunshine and a sense of what is immortal in man. The devil can take the body whenever he chooses. So I say:

"Keep the resurrection feast—let us drink now to our first look of love! Where's your glass, Meta? You look so solemn! Put your trust in your God and He'll surely bring it to pass—even I say that, worldly man as I am, to whom God has not yet revealed Himself. What will you say, then, Meta, my dear wife? Here's to what can never die, come what may."

Meta hesitated no longer, but, overcome by his words, clinked her glass with his. He looked affectionately into those grey eyes that met his own brown ones with such absolute candour as to expel any thought of discord and make him believe in the truth of every word he had spoken or still meant to speak. As to Meta, though she might not be entirely deceived, she clung the more firmly to her faith in his better nature and thus regained the confidence and joy that she felt in this husband of hers, with his abounding vitality.

Alma felt almost stunned at first when she heard him talk in this strain, but since she, too, shared in great measure his reverence for the woman he was now honouring, it was a relief rather than a pain to her to see him so quickly return to his old love and loyalty. And no sooner did Meta see that her niece was her frank natural self once more than she, too, regained her usual calm and cordial manner.

"How well you have spoken again, Emil dear!" she said with approval and eyes full of loving mockery. "'The blessed sun'—yes, that and some good roast meat into the bargain are all you need to be full of good ideas. But that about the first look of love is really true, my man!"

At this Emil, who had been drinking rather fast and frequently, had a flash of real inspiration.

"True indeed it shall be!" he prophesied, as he put down his glass. "This woman has the look of one bringing good tidings. No trifling possession! But possibly it has never struck you yet, Meta, that such as we do not always find it child's play to live at your side. Often, indeed, I stand in imminent danger of being overwhelmed by the transitory things of the flesh, and then just one look of yours is enough to save me from the horror. Death itself must lose its terror when you are near. When my time comes, you will be there with help, if only you can reach me. No, don't mind what I say; I have been grovelling

about too long, under the surface. I'm just a revolutionary in disguise, and when you know that, you know what to expect. Will you drink to this pact with me, Meta?"

"I must consider the matter a little first," she answered almost doubtfully. "I don't know—I would like to make a good bargain. And it's difficult to know always, Emil. Sometimes, even if we do know all about a thing, we still do not know if it is the right thing for us. We will possess our souls in patience and the fear of God, whilst we go on helping each other. I would like to drink to that with you, my husband—not once, but many times."

And the look in her eyes was very loving, even if a thought too grave. Emil was quite carried away by her impressive beauty, and Alma's heart, too, was so touched that she asked herself whether she had character enough to become such a wife, and sufficient wisdom and skill to achieve a like happiness. For the present she had to say "No." The whole proceeding depressed her a little, and she could have found it in her heart to be jealous of her aunt.

Suddenly Emil, in his mood of exaltation, began to speak about her.

"I must tell you I had a little affair with Alma this morning," he began, with his frank, ingenuous laugh; and his words gave Alma such a shock that the whole room swam before her and she did not know where to look. "That's why she was so quiet at first," he went on to explain. "You see, I was furious because you hadn't stayed at home, although I had begged you to. Like a silly lad, I suddenly didn't know what to do when you had gone out of the door. Everything seemed wretched here. I could have wrung the necks of all the canaries, with their silly antics. Well, then Alma all at once began singing 'That's What the Young Girls Love,' and her song was so seductive that it drew me to the kitchen, whether I would

into your looking-glass without doing any harm. It will show you your youthful charm, and when you've grasped what you are like, your loneliness will go, and its place will be taken by confidence and joy of life. Then that means the beginning of many good things, believe me."

Greatly attracted by his words, Clara seized his hand gratefully, with a feeling that was something more than sisterly affection, but shyly let it drop again as she remembered that he belonged to Alma, and said with a sigh of utter desolation:

"I am an outcast and all alone. God helps the great folk and does not trouble about such poor girls as me. My mother and brother have got away from the misery of it all. As to my father—what will come of him I don't know. With things like this, only human help is any good to me, not prayer nor a looking-glass."

She looked at him with a sad smile. In the light of the staircase lamp—for they were already outside the flat—a strange, mysterious attraction seemed hidden in the folds of her black dress. Tear-drops, golden with reflected brightness and shining like a child's, yet with a seductive womanly charm of their own, hung suspended from her eyes. Youth strove with maturity in the fine lines of her figure. The lace on her garments that peeped out through her open jacket made a strong appeal to him, as an eloquent witness of her health and innocence, although her greatest attraction in his eyes was her loneliness and her budding womanhood, so evident in the mingled indecision and instinctive knowledge of her every movement.

He noticed admiringly all this, that had been nonexistent at her last visit, and said involuntarily:

"Some day you will make a great impression on men, Clara, rest assured of that. All this sadness will drop from you, and then all at once there will emerge a charming young woman, whom many will try to win. But then, don't throw yourself away, do you hear? Remember me,

and that I have been the first to warn you of what was coming."

"There won't be one of them like you," she said in a tone of sorrowful doubt.

She was still looking at him, and as he gave no answer, she offered him her lips with a silent, pleading gesture. Felgentreu, carried away by her devotion, stooped and kissed her. Her warm, full lips returned his kiss with heartfelt emotion. But just as he was beginning to wonder at the self-assurance and vitality that was suddenly springing forth from her silent desolation, she tore herself away from him—all this had happened in the dark street, just outside the front door of the building—and immediately after she was hastening with tripping steps down past the houses, and disappeared from view without once looking back.

"There, now she has started too!" he murmured, as with a sigh of relief he turned back into the house. And with a satisfied nod he added: "A good girl! Take what you need from me, but misuse and abuse I cannot allow. For it is not only a child that is on its way for me, but dignity and responsibility. That's where the new life lies, Emil!"

He hung about on the steps, deep in thought and wonder, until the light went out. Then he went up to his flat and let himself in. Until long after midnight he sat engrossed in new ideas and useful meditation, gazing by the shaded light of the bedside lamp at the peacefully breathing form of his heart's love and the future mother of his child, and when he did at last prepare to go to bed, he had for ever left childish things behind him and become a man in very deed. It is true, the old restless desire for change still murmured and stirred in his heart, but Alma's love of her native soil had conquered in the main, and under the common-sense pressure of her opposition, which came with all the strength of some force

of Nature, the process of his thoughts now dwelt on a dim vision of a cottage outside Berlin in the city's model village for workers and officials.

CHAPTER XXII

As far as old Lippke was concerned, the body of his son still lay unburied above-ground; he could not make up his mind to lose it out of his sight. It is true that in the body he went back on Sunday evening to the works, but in spirit he was still standing by the open coffin, vowing vengeance before that dead face on the evil-doer. That night he passed in dignified silence, as he went round setting his clocks. He felt it was a mighty deed on his part, to have passed all the days since Julius had gone without a drop of brandy, although the desire for it almost killed him, but he must now "sacrifice to the dead" or take some action, and for the present it seemed to him better to sacrifice. Every moment he kept on saying to himself: "For three days I gave him a last respite. If he had done honour to his second victim and had the courage to look him in the face, I might possibly have spared him. I should have seen if Julius, too, pardoned him, and then I should have had no right to pursue him any farther. But he never came near, and now he has fallen into my hands." This falling-into-his-hands added to the sense of exaltation which now filled his soul. He would perhaps have felt it just as strongly if Julius had "pardoned" Felgentreu, but since the murderer had given no opportunity for that, he gave himself a momentary respite by declaring that Felgentreu had now fallen into his hands.

He lived a whole night buoyed up by such infernal consolation. As the day dawned his heart began to tremble, his hands also, when he laid his tallies on the

table in the porter's office, and as he passed through the gate the trembling had spread to his knees as well. His excitement increased with almost every step that took him towards his home. Several times his hands went up to his breast pocket, in which he was keeping his dead son's last will and testament. As he drew near to the dark, dirty doorway leading to the courtyard, he felt as though he ought to have gills to open on either side of his throat if he was to go on breathing. He lacked the courage to look up at his windows. He was conscious of a feeling of silent stupefaction in his head, only broken by a low but agonizing note of coming perdition in the very depths of his ear; he understood at once that all his future fate depended on whether this note should grow nearer and louder or fade away in the distance. Then he had a distinct sense of slipping down into a yawning abyss, at the bottom of which, after one last attempt to slip by, he was brought face to face with a relentless fate. His eyes had a wavering, unsteady look as he entered his flat, and although he apparently hung up his hat in his usual way, he really did so with the suffocating sensation of a man awaiting judgment. But he gave himself a little further respite, and instead of yielding to his agonizing desire to go into his son's room, he entered the living-room. It was empty, but the table was laid for breakfast; as he saw only two cups, he felt he must scream with grief, but in a moment the memory of the murderer, and that he had fallen into his hands, calmed him again. He could, in a way, punish him too by withholding his son's last legacy from the woman Emil loved. For a time he strode up and down beside the table, turning over his plans, and not until he felt quite sure of himself again did he yield to his desire and walked—much more firmly and confidently than he had expected—towards that other empty room. But even before he reached the door he seemed to feel some spectral hand strike him on the chest.

With a sense of dismay he turned the handle and went in. Cold, lifeless air met him; the windows stood open; the bed was taken to pieces; pillows and mattresses lay on all the chairs; Julius's things were all put together in a corner, out of the way of the cleaning operations. Not a sound was to be heard, but the dead silence seemed to greet him as with a low roar from some great yawning throat, so that he started back in dismay and stood for a long time on the threshold unable to stir, looking with narrowed eyes at the fearful picture of his own spiritual ruin, which met him here personified in material form.

After the lapse of several minutes, he drew a sudden breath and turned to go back. He did not understand what he had seen, nor with his stubborn, awkward temperament did he wish to understand, simple as it appeared. He went back at once to the living-room, but the wolf-like prowl that he again resumed always seemed to lead him aside in a direction which he did not desire, but feared, indeed, as an ox does the slaughter-house with its smell of blood. No longer master of himself, he ran into his bedroom, and when he came out again he had sought courage in several glasses of brandy, hastily gulped down one after the other.

Clara was coming forward from the other side with the coffee on a tray. In a quiet, timid voice she said, "Good morning," and her tone aroused his attention, although possibly any tone from her might have done so, for he was already in search of a scapegoat to take the place of the absent and unattainable cause of his misery. Moreover, it struck him that she was wearing her black outdoor dress and had on her boots. She put the tray on the table and placed the coffee-pot on its stand with the blue Dutch windmill. A sudden thought flashed through his mind, and he hastened out of the door to the kitchen, which opened into the girl's bedroom. This was a kind of larger annexe, divided by a so-called "hanging-floor"

into an upper and lower room; even the narrow window was intersected by this floor. The lower room was used for keeping all kinds of household things, washing, and suchlike, whilst the top part was meant for a servant's bedroom, and there Clara slept as long as they had this flat. The old man glanced up there, and then came back with a heavy triumphant tread to the sitting-room.

"Where have you been last night?" he said at once. "Have you been at the Felgentreu's or haven't you? What? I can't hear. Can't you speak louder?"

Clara's colour faded until she was deadly pale, but she realized what was at stake. With something like a prayer her memory flew back to Felgentreu, and summoning all her courage she said: "I suppose I am not to go to the Felgentreus because you mean to defraud Alma of her legacy from Julius." She spoke in a low tone, but with a firm look that left no doubt of her open defiance.

"So you've noticed I meant to keep his darling's legacy?" he snarled. "Think of that now, such a tender heart. Got anything else to say in your defence?"

"I don't need any defence," she declared firmly. "I've a clean conscience and am free to do what I choose."

Suddenly, however, she felt overcome by terror at being alone in the desolate flat with this man with bloodshot eyes, who was her father. The atmosphere of death that seemed to envelop him like some mouldering shroud, her filial dependence upon his fatherhood, which even now she could not forget—all this seemed to rob her of strength and resolution, so that she made no effort to defend herself as he came towards her. With some difficulty she managed to elude his first grasp, but as he barred her exit from the room, she saw no possibility at all of safety, and at his third or fourth attempt he had her firmly by the arm.

"You plotter!" he exclaimed in a passionate whisper, as he peered straight into her eyes. "Joined my mortal

to vent all his paternal bitterness upon her as soon as she should make her appearance. In no other way could he endure life between his two dead. Without the deathly silence on the one side and the terrible rattle on the other, he could now have felt quite comfortable. To counteract their effect, however, he continued to satisfy his thirst for brandy, but the alcohol had the one disadvantage of making him tired. At last, towards noon, after the sleepless night at his work and all the excitements of the last few days and of that morning as well, he was overcome by such a longing for sleep that he filled his pipe with some tea that he found in the store cupboard, as he had heard that smoking tea had a most stimulating effect. He considered the plan of giving Clara that evening her choice of coming out and begging his pardon, or being barred in for the night by furniture pushed before her door, only to tread the path of penitence the next morning. Meantime, however, not even the tea could extricate him from the swamp of alcohol, in which he was now totally immersed. He had sat down to rest a moment on the sofa, and was just thinking he had better take a seat in the kitchen, in case he went to sleep, when his eyes suddenly closed; in a moment he was so sound asleep that a gunshot at his ear would not have wakened him. Still, it is not certain that he would not have sprung up wide awake again at the slightest movement of the prey for which he was lying in wait. The evening before, Clara, after leaving Felgentreu, had hurried aimlessly through street after street, with no other object than to hasten on and put some distance between her and the man she had left. Her heart beat quickly with tender emotion, but her eyes were full of tears, and the memory of her mother seemed to rise unbidden, with a smile of affection, to light her path like some beneficent star. Feelings and words flitted by as gently as the flight of doves, and at last she remembered Frau Meta. She felt a desire to go to

her for counsel, so she turned round and walked towards her house. She forgot, however, that Frau Meta had moved, and spent nearly as long again in reaching the new flat. Meantime eleven o'clock had struck, so it was quite impossible to think of going into the house, much more, then, of ringing her bell. And as, moreover, she was being followed by a man, she ran home like a hunted creature and got in half an hour before midnight. With a feeling of repulsion she crossed the stuffy passage and shuddered as she entered the flat, where the first thing she did was to turn on every light. Each step she took she felt guided by the memory of Alma's flight from home. The only point on which she was doubtful was whether she should take her courage in her hands and tell her father plainly of her intention, or whether she should slip away quietly some time during the day, whilst he was asleep, and thus leave this place of grievous woe. She believed she was quite justified in following the latter plan, but felt that by the former she would best honour the mother who had brought her up and also fulfil her own filial duty. This question was still hanging in the balance when her father came home. She had been sitting quite at a loss for a full hour on the chair in her little room in front of her half-packed travelling-basket, because she felt quite certain she would never have the heart to leave the old man so relentlessly to his fate. And was it not possible that sadness and grief might in the end so soften him that he would consent to living together in peace?

But now she felt there was nothing for it but to follow Alma's example. It is true that her filial conscience still pricked her at the thought of how she was going to leave him all alone in the empty flat, and she wondered who would tidy the rooms for him and where he would get his food; but before she could solve the problem, she cried herself to sleep. After the wakeful night, thoughts of Felgentreu changed into longing dreams of him.

or no. Of course, she was thinking about her young man, the dispenser, and her trip to Potsdam this afternoon. But I began asking her if she knew what she was singing and how she felt towards the man of whom she was thinking, and at last I fiercely demanded she should give him up and take me instead. And when she gave me, as was but fitting, a short, contemptuous answer, I seized hold of her to give her a kiss. But you should have just seen the to-do. She broke my pipe to atoms, kicked my slipper off my foot, threw me out of the kitchen, banged the door behind me, and there I stood outside."

"But that's not true a bit," Alma exclaimed in mingled laughter and consternation. "You are telling the most frightful stories. How can you say such things to Aunt Meta?" And with a touch of resentment she threatened: "Some day you will do some real harm with your talk, see if you don't!"

"Come now!" he answered, with a laugh and an affectionate flash in his brown eyes. "Not true, isn't it? Well, then, just tell the truth yourself. Now, then, there you sit with your blushes and can't find a word to say. I'm in the very same fix myself, though, Alma. I count myself fortunate to have the society of two such superior women. To-day I have taken little Alma to my heart as an adopted daughter—no, I mean as a foster-father—and I feel quite uplifted in consequence. It really was something like a first lovers' look. One lives who knows how many years in company with the child and sees nothing but one more little hoyden; then all of a sudden one's eyes are opened and one discovers, Heaven alone knows what. Drink to the new relationship, Alma, child. You must think of your new father, you know! Well, Meta, after all, we have got a child at last."

He looked at his new child with loving eyes and true paternal pride, and then, satisfied, or rather delighted, at the turn matters had taken, he turned his gaze on to his

When she awoke, the flat was so quiet that she took courage again. The pale golden beams of the autumn sun were falling in through her little half-window and flickering on the faded leaves of the one wretched city birch standing out in the courtyard. A sudden longing filled her heart for liberty, joy, and all the active, unfettered life away out there. With quickened pulse she got up and cautiously opened her door to listen. The old man was breathing deeply and snoring, and Clara was frightened at first to hear him so close in the sitting-room.

But soon she told herself that he was again the worse for drink, and, overcome by fresh terror, she stepped into the vestibule, so that she could look into the sitting-room. He was half-lying over the couch, his cap over his face and his head tipped forward, whilst his pipe lay on the floor. For some time her sense of filial pity kept her eyes fixed on this sight; at last, with a deep sigh, she turned away. With all speed she put on her hat, took her umbrella and went on tiptoe to put it outside the flat door and then to fetch her basket. To her dismay she found the door locked, the key removed, and even the chain put up. For a moment everything swam before her eyes; she ran feverishly to the little key-cupboard; the fact that the second key had also disappeared only confirmed her terrible suspicions that she was a prisoner. With the greatest haste, and not nearly so quietly as was advisable in her present position, she tried all the other keys, but not one fitted. In utter consternation she stood there some considerable time, feeling that all was lost. The old man continued to snore without a second's pause; to Clara it seemed like the sound of some terrible pain that she herself was enduring. With a feeling of repulsion, and yet impelled as by some mysterious and criminal promise, she crossed the vestibule and again approached him, until she stood in the half-open doorway with one hand

on the framework and the other on her fast-beating heart, looking at him wide-eyed and anxious. After deep thought she went on a few steps, still ready for sudden flight, until at last he lay in deep unconsciousness immediately before her. A glimmer of his eyeballs shone through the partly open eyelids; the deep-cut lines around his open mouth expressed unutterable depths of misery. Clara very nearly fell at his feet in tears, but the next moment her youthful sense of self-preservation flared up through all her compassion, and, almost without realizing her action, she stretched out her hand to touch the sleeper. Just a last moment of timidity and it was in his coat pocket, and after a short, fruitless search, out again and feeling anxiously in the other. She did not find what she wanted there either, and, almost helpless with terror, she searched his waistcoat pockets with no better result. A sob of terror rose in her throat, and she again felt in almost utter despair. Yet once more she summoned up courage to feel the outside of the nearest trouser pocket, bent with flying heart over her intoxicated father, who was now beginning to babble in his sleep, and assured herself that neither did the other contain anything more than his pocket-knife. The keys, therefore, must be in the back pocket, on which he was lying. She sobbed aloud in her angry disappointment, but then the extremity of her despair suddenly changed into the utmost temerity; whilst the tears rained down her cheeks she took hold of the heavy body, and, exerting all her strength, rolled it over to one side. The old man's babble still went on in some such words as "Well, well, just wait!" But Clara paid no heed; she thought to herself: "If he catches me, he might kill me," and was prepared for anything. But the next moment she had the key. The old man now stirred and, utterly overcome with sleep, began to move his hand as if in self-defence; a few seconds more and the awakening would certainly come. Clara watched its first signs in

horror, and stood a moment in helpless expectation. Then suddenly she roused herself and tore out of the room as if the police were at her heels. Once outside, she rattled the key into the lock; all prudence was thrown to the winds. The door flew open. She dragged out her basket, put it on the stair, took the umbrella, drew the key from inside the door, put it in outside, turned it twice in all haste, and left it sticking all awry. Now he could wake from his drunken slumber and make what noise he liked; but for the moment he was once more asleep!

How she then got down the stairs with her basket and out of the house she never afterwards could tell. Later, however, a young man, whom she knew by sight, chanced to offer to carry her basket, and insisted on doing so, but where he met her she could not remember, whether in the house, the courtyard, or the street. He asked where it was to go, and it was this question that roused her at last, for her thoughts had not yet travelled so far ahead. At the very beginning she had had a faint idea of going to Meta, but this she had given up. Why, she did not know. Now she felt she preferred absolute liberty to all other possibility. So she said she wanted to go to the station, and that she was hoping some cab might pass by empty. But instead of that the young man advised their carrying the basket to the next street corner, where cabs were always waiting, and this seemed the best plan to her as well. She timidly gave him to understand that she was going to visit a relation in the country, but then to her relief got a cab at once, and from pure shyness gave the youth a somewhat curt dismissal. To the driver she said: "To the Lehrte station," and after what seemed to her far too much fuss and delay, a start was made. Quite at her wits' end, and somewhat disheartened, she drove towards the station without an idea of what she was going to do there, until at last she dimly remembered that she had once been to see an

acquaintance in a lodging-house belonging to the Martha community, where girls could always live when they were looking for work. That seemed to her the right place. When the driver thought he had come to his destination she gave him this fresh address. Now a genuine Berlin cabman is not easily astonished, but drives wherever fate leads him. And after this happy solution of her difficulty, Clara resigned herself with a heartfelt sigh of relief to whatever good fortune might bring her. She cried, it is true, for a little bit of the way, but, on the whole, she was full of confident faith. Moreover, she had a little money, owing to a twofold legacy from her mother. The first was that silent Frau Lippke had passed on to her daughter a certain prudent thought for the future, so that Clara, in spite of her youthful health and spirits, had without any prompting, all through her life, put by a little secret hoard for any rainy day that might come. This she had done, not in consequence of any clearly defined plans, but with the silent instinct of a creature that has simply, so to speak, grasped its fate in life. In addition to this moral inheritance, she had since the death of her mother had a material legacy as well. When she was tidying out all the cupboards, she had come upon a little box, containing a total amount of something over 200 marks. It was not clear whether Frau Lippke had accumulated this money simply as a precautionary measure or in consequence of some visionary plans of her own, but in any case there it was. For some considerable time Clara was in doubt as to what she should do with it. Once she spoke about it to Julius, but her brother had by then already reached the stage when such questions had lost all interest for him. She had not been able to make up her mind to tell her father about it, and so the little hoard had at last become hers. Now it accompanied her into the unknown and provided the capital needed for her self-emancipation.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLARA'S escape, with all its attendant circumstances, had not been accomplished so secretly but that it made some impression on the sleeper, in spite of his intoxication. His mind made anxious and agonized efforts to awake, but no matter how painfully he struggled for consciousness the alcohol he had consumed always overwhelmed him by fresh waves of faintness and carried him back into the morass of drunkenness, beneath whose waters he sank once more. How long this battle might have lasted he did not know, but suddenly he started up with a troubled cry from his stupor, sprang to his feet, and looked round him in utter confusion and entirely unable to understand anything at first. The door-bell was ringing, and in a second he only too clearly remembered his daughter and those ghostly visions that had tortured him. With staggering footsteps he hurried out of the parlour into the kitchen. The door from Clara's room stood open, and a second glance showed him that the front-door was no longer on the chain. The bell kept on its insistent ringing. When he ran, his eyes starting out of his head, to open the door, he found it unlocked. He hurriedly felt for his keys and found one gone. "Given me the slip!" he muttered. "Robbed me and got off!" One of the neighbours had seen the key outside in the lock and had taken it out. As if in a trance, he took it from her. He was completely overwhelmed, and spent a long time looking for fresh evidence of Clara's escape, which he was totally unable to grasp. With wavering steps and terribly excited, he ran from the door back to Clara's room, from there in mad distress to the parlour, then, unable to believe his senses, back once more to her attic, to get fresh confirmation of it all again, and once he even went out of the flat and down the staircase

for about ten steps. But his knees trembled to such an extent that he gave up the attempt, especially as he saw its utter uselessness, since she must have gone hours before, and crept back panting into the flat. But there stood the door of his son's room facing him, tall and pale like some dumb, accusing form, and he rushed past in terror into the parlour, where, in his confusion, he began his former expedient of first shutting himself in and then, in his fear of the death hovering in the bedroom, setting the door ajar once more. But this time there was no longer any young creature near to give him reassurance, even though he ill-treated it, and so great was his fright that his whole body was bathed in a sudden cold sweat. Without knowing why, he hastily began to fumble about in his pockets; then he tried to bend down and pick up his pipe from the floor, but he turned giddy and gave up the attempt. He cast an uncertain glance at the window. The sun had long since disappeared from the yard; the birch-tree stood with its withered leaves in the waning light. Evening and night must soon be back.

Lippke pulled himself together and began to walk up and down again, but cautiously, as if to avoid rousing his dead and the horror that filled the flat. What must be done now? he asked himself. Wherever he looked, however passionate his mental efforts, there seemed no help for him. In this increased distress he remembered the comfort he had found since his wife's death in his bottle of brandy, and he greedily poured down two or three glasses of the spirit into his empty stomach.

In a sudden flash, however, he saw the figure of Felgentreu stand before his mental vision as the cause of all his unhappiness, of all the ills that had befallen him. He studied the vision with half-shut, blinking eyes as he muttered involuntarily: "Condemned to death, Felgentreu." Then, however, he shrank from the sound of his own voice in the death-like silence around him, and

continued in a hoarse whisper: "Vengeance is hanging over your head!" He began reckoning up the sum-total of insults and humiliations from the coffee-party and the roundabout to his son's coffin and what had happened since. "No doubt you'd like to make the old man kill himself! But there you'll fail. Kill someone else—ah, perhaps! What a life! If only the world 'ud come to an end that 'ud be a relief. Get out of my sight! Don't defile the memory of my wife and of my good, pure children that fills this place."

In deep distress he turned away and, with shaking hands, lit up one lamp after another, until not a single spot where he might go was left in darkness. He was tormented with the thought that he must get his son's razor from his drawer, but at the same time he told himself that he had no idea now where Clara had put everything in her cleaning, and as long as he did not have the razor there was a further postponement of his act of revenge.

As the hour approached for his night-work he knew for certain that his enemy was driving him "to kill himself," and he was already tormented by clear mental pictures, horrible beyond endurance, of cutting his own throat with his son's razor and gasping out his life like a "bleeding pig." These visions drove him out of the house at last, without having dared to eat anything or to turn off the lights, although he had half an hour to spare. He got some food in a public-house on his way, and had another drink as well, for he was now transformed into a bottomless well or a mountain of sand that no liquid could fill. Scarcely had he emptied one glass than his mouth clamoured for another. Only the remnant of pride of office, which he still kept in spite of his moral ruin, prevented his yielding in the inn to a wild desire to get dead drunk. Totally obsessed by this idea, he reeled on to the factory. The gate-keeper was so struck by his

appearance that he spoke to him to-day, in accordance with the order given him to stop any man who was not sober, but Lippke answered him furiously, with unseemly defiance, followed up by abuse of such violence as evidently made an impression on the porter; at any rate, he let him pass on then, although he resolved to report him, as so much depended upon his reliability as the night-watchman.

When Lippke entered the factory yard and all these buildings, chimneys, boiler-houses, sheds and outhouses rose before his eyes, he suddenly realized that his soul was filled with an entirely new feeling towards them—a feeling he had never known before—but one of amazement, strength and insistence, namely hatred. In some way or other they seemed a personification of Felgentreu, with his superiority and love of order, his reasonableness and his cursed freedom.

That was perhaps the contradiction in his character that Lippke least understood and most resented. As he made his first round through the factory premises he felt as if he was passing through Felgentreu's heart and lungs, and, utterly exhausted by his loathing and worn-out with the self-mastery required to do his work, even under these conditions, he returned in two hours' time to the watchman's room, where he could rest for an hour. It was a bare-walled place, plainly furnished with nothing more than a chair, a table and a couch. On the wall hung a clock that at ten, one and four o'clock rang an iron bell for five minutes, with a din loud enough to wake the dead. Until now Lippke had heard this tremendous noise with utter indifference.

Now, too, he threw himself as usual on the couch, and at once fell into a deep sleep, since here he no longer heard the death-rattle or saw the door that together threw their dreadful spells around him. But on the stroke of ten, when the clock on the wall began its usual din,

he started to his feet in such terror and confusion that his first instinct was to take to headlong flight. Then the automatic remembrance of his work restored his self-control. "Yes, yes, all right!" he growled. But after he had thus shown that he knew his duty and his readiness to fulfil it, and the bell in utter disregard still continued its wild rattle, he was suddenly seized with ungovernable fury. "Stop your row and be damned to you!" he shouted up at it. "Can't you see I'm going? The man that set you up should be hung! Gur-r-r, gur-r-r! ring yourself to bits—gur-r-r, gur-r-r! Hold your mouth, I tell you!" And with a fresh flood of curses he went out of the room in wild fury about "all this." The mocking tones of the bell still pursued him as he began his round, almost shedding tears of impotent rage.

At first he noticed nothing out of the common, except that he now hated all the clocks he had to set as well as the bell. He angrily tore open the doors of their cases, put in his key, and banged them to again; he even spat at one. He seemed to hear a strange whisper in his ears that "all this," too, had fallen into his hands. As he was passing in his usual way from one part of the factory to another, keeping a look-out for any chance suspicion of fire, which it was his duty to report, he remembered that he had Felgentreu to thank for his post in the factory too. This hard, sleepless work with the poor pay, the bell in the watchman's room and the clocks—all this was connected with him. Silence and black darkness filled every corner and recess. From time to time a small electric bulb lit up his way along some passage; here and there the huge form of a machine could be dimly seen in the passing ray of his lantern, only to fade away in the darkness once more. Some corner with its driving-belts and points would flash forth in the momentary light and as quickly disappear again. To-night he viewed

it all with hostile aversion, but could find no point of successful attack.

Prepared for unusual happenings and keenly on the alert, he strode through the offices and passed the pay counters. 'If only I were to break into these safes,' he suddenly thought, "and get off with the money!" By way of experiment he stepped up to the safe and touched it; the metal was cold as death and filled him with unpleasant sensations. He turned away in disappointment and cast a further critical glance round the office. But the voice at his ear whispered: "You mustn't delay with unimportant things. To-day you have to finish the whole business," and he went on a little more quickly, as if to make up for lost time.

The nearer he got to the store-sheds, however, the more constrained he felt by a new feeling, quite inexplicable even to himself. They were filled with whole mountains of the most inflammable material; a flying spark—and in the wind then blowing "all this" would be a sea of fire in less than half an hour's time. His hand felt round about in his pocket; some matches rattled under his fingers, and so far all was "clear." "Do you see," he muttered, glancing round uneasily, "when you hear that Anton has lit the fire, you'll burn in it, too, like a scrap of paper! Then I'd just like to see in what quarter defeat would come. That would be the judgment over all capitalism and all oppression! Ah, you simpleton, with your defeat!"

The faint moonlight that penetrated the uncleaned windows of the shed seemed to fill it with a flickering glow that only awaited his hand to fan it into sudden flame. His heart beat now fast, now slow, and he breathed with difficulty. With trembling hands he selected the right key from his bunch and went up to the door as cautiously as to an opponent who could not be trusted. He sniffed up the smell that floated out into the air

wife, who again was thinking far more than she chose to show.

"I have had the child for a long time already," she said, making a little gentle fun of his enthusiasm. "It's a good thing you've discovered her, too, or she might possibly have disappeared one fine day without leaving a trace behind. You needn't hesitate to help yourself to some more kohlrabi, Alma, for in the first place your parents have a weakness for it, and, secondly, you are a dainty puss. Be thankful if all your life you can get bottled kohlrabi to eat."

The dinner was a roast with potatoes and kohlrabi of Frau Meta's own bottling, on which she prided herself a little.

"Oh, Uncle Emil is not specially fond of it," Alma laughed in some confusion as she took a little more. "He only eats it to please you."

The two elders could not help laughing at her sulky tone, and Meta remarked to Emil: "There's your daughter; now show her her father." This he did by filling up her glass again and giving another solemn oration as he drank a toast to the liberty of the individual. The canaries tuned up to accompany him, and the furniture shone a cosy brown in the sunshine, as if it, too, had perfectly understood it all. Even the Emperor's portrait on the wall seemed to agree with him in its suggestion of pomp and brilliance—but the window curtains hung in silent meditation, that made them look like hypocrites and justified Felgentreu's conviction of their fundamental lack of truth.

All dinner-time he kept up on the heights, teasing Alma continually about the Lippkes and her gentleman dispenser, pretending he was jealous, wanting to help her dress, and compelling Meta to interfere more than once. At last Alma really felt quite uncertain as regarded her new father, and in this mood went off on her pleasure trip.

around, opened the door, and, stooping down, stood on the threshold. In the faint moonlight filmy mountains of piled-up fibre, some half loose, shone before him like great white ghosts, and he could not help noticing that they all had a distinctive character of dignified aloofness, which filled him with immediate disappointment.

Much annoyed and already half-sobered, he looked at the dim light of the windows and suddenly wondered what he had come to do in this place. It seemed to him such an impossible undertaking to throw in a lighted match that once again he felt the onset of that dull sense of defeat. Nevertheless he hastily snatched the box of matches from his pocket. As he tried to light one of them he dropped the box. When this happened again at his second and third attempt, he muttered a few curses, but, instead of renewing the attempt, he accepted his failure.

"Cursed rubbish!" he stormed, as he retreated in something like fear. "I shall only do myself some harm with the beastly thing. No, no; one man by himself isn't strong enough!" He shut the door in his disappointment, but remained standing outside, deep in thought. Suddenly he gnashed his teeth and laughed aloud. "Well, now, wouldn't Felgentreu grin if he knew old Lippke was trying to set fire to the works! There, lucky for me, I didn't."

A second more and the thought of his unfinished round flashed through his brain. When he saw he was much later than he had thought, he made a hasty start and hurried on, not to be behind with the next clock. His pace quickened till at last he was actually running, and panting with the fear of being too late, a fault of which so far he had never been guilty. But when he reached the clock it had already run down. He stood for some time gazing at it with eyes full of consternation and hatred; then, however, he bethought himself that he

must at any rate get to the next in time. So he began to run again, but again arrived too late. In desperation he hurried on to the third, which he managed to reach before it had stopped, but by now he was a complete moral and physical wreck. He cast side-glances of anxious fear at the tall windows of the factory rooms, which now admitted the full light of the moonbeams, as he hastened on mechanically. He reached all the other clocks before the set time, so that he had to wait till they were running down, but at each he had the satisfaction of helping the winding process with a fierce kick of his foot.

His limbs felt utterly worn out as he threw himself again on the couch in his room, and his physical condition was much worse than before. His ears roared, and his liver and tongue alike seemed withering—as they had not done before—so unutterable was his general sense of weakness. To add to his misery, he had such a suffocating fear of the alarm-bell's rattle that he dared not sleep in spite of his exhaustion.

At last, in desperation, he seized the flat bottle in his breast pocket and emptied it at a draught. This calmed him and brought him sleep that lasted until day began to break. Quite bewildered, he looked at the clock, which pointed to close upon six o'clock. At 4 a.m. he ought to have started on his third round; either he had not heard the alarm or, if awakened, he had fallen asleep again at once, helplessly overcome by alcohol. Now he sprang up like one possessed, seized lamp and keys, and rushed out of the door. In aimless confusion he began racing through his round. An inner feeling that something was wrong somewhere drove him on through corridors and shops, over landings and stairs. All the clocks had stopped. But it was not the clocks; it was something that must be cleared away—something enormous, gigantic even.

He cast hasty inquiring glances in every direction,

hunted through the great rooms, rummaged in all the corners, and found nothing but order and the requisite preparedness for a fresh day's work. Daylight was now coming fast; the great workroom windows swam in the first flood of sunshine like fish in the ocean. The furnace-men had been busy in the boiler-house ever since five o'clock. They had not overslept themselves; they could still "take their share" in the factory work. As he mechanically turned out the night-lamps he felt as though he were turning out the light of his own life. Then the workmen began to come, making their appearance as legitimate phenomena of the day, and, with a few slightly astonished glances, completely transformed him into the ghost that he already felt he was.

With faltering steps he passed through a side door out of this hall, meeting the light outside like a dying man, and then pushed his way through the incoming stream of workers towards the main exit. Before the gate he noticed what he had so long looked for in vain: on the threshold of that shed lay the box of matches that he had dropped. The yellow, sulphurous things, with their red phosphorus heads, that he still used, could not fail to attract the greatest attention in such a place. "There, you see, now you've let yourself in for it!" he said to himself, as he stopped with a sudden jerk. "Only very few folk use such matches nowadays, so no denial's any good. Your honour's smirched. You'll be a gaol-bird, with no longer any right to speak of God, Emperor and country. What about defeat now? And one you'll never really get over. But now, look sharp, Anton, d'ye understand? To gaol you'll not go; you'll spare your blessed dead that disgrace!"

With a shiver he passed on. His heart felt like a lump of ice inside him; he walked stiffly along the street; his staring, hunted eyes gazed vacantly into space and his lower jaw quivered. In this condition he approached his

flat, went through the passage in the wall, and crossed the courtyard.

Now he knew exactly where to find the razor. He only had to take a step into the room, to put his hand on it at once and take it out with him. Instinctively he turned a critical glance up towards his windows, and then saw through these pale greenish eyes behind the transparent curtains that all the lights were burning as he had left them yesterday. They were waiting for him. At this idea the skin of his head twitched as though a thousand ants were running over it, and in his fright he cleared his throat loudly and harshly. Utterly at a loss, he looked away and walked on. But when he stood upstairs outside the door and pulled out his keys, he could not make up his mind to put one in the lock. With every nerve in his body he sensed the pale, silent door of his son's room on his immediate left and heard the empty flat reverberate with that solemn death-rattle from the other bedroom. Utterly defeated, he turned round and went down the stairs again. Up to now these phenomena had been confined to the flat only, but he did not know when they might come out and spread through house and street in their search for him.

To do something with himself, he went into the next public-house and ordered some breakfast. In this environment, at any rate, he felt to a certain extent safe enough to summon up courage to ask for a dram as well. This he gulped down into his empty stomach, then greedily drank his coffee and ate a roll with it, but he found it hard to swallow and left a second untouched. In its stead he filled his pipe and ordered another drink. By degrees he began to revive, but his mind was depressed and full of premonitions of disgrace and condemnation. But he faced them, and determined to conquer this senseless superstitious fear of his. It was essential he should have the razor.

The noise of his own feet on the pavement resounded in his ears as an insistent echo of the approach of some dread evil. As he passed through the walled-in passage his footsteps sounded to him exactly like the blows of some assassin's axe or the victim's cries for help; with the exception of that clanging bell, he had never heard such a repulsive sound. In the courtyard he avoided looking up at the windows, yet he saw, and closed his lips in hard defiance. Those up there had always despised and avoided him even before his fall, when not the slightest slur rested upon his reputation as an honest man. They had ignored it to nullify his greatness. But now no doors nor noises nor lights should prevent his producing the terrible proof and solving the doubt for ever. Only on his way up the stairs he began to tremble. The death-rattle was now distinctly audible throughout the house, and even the door in some mysterious fashion had made its appearance too, and before he quite reached the top he gave up the struggle and turned to go down again. In his bewilderment he slipped and fell down headlong almost to the bottom. Without any realization of what he was doing, he staggered out of the door, across the courtyard, through the closed passage to the street, where he began to run, heedless of all direction. The phenomena had found their way out too—everything came hovering above him from behind. He suddenly shivered in the cold sweat that broke out all over his body. Yet he fancied that some sharp turn had brought him into a side-street, so, as a precautionary measure, he made a second, and so got into a tangle of streets where he had scarcely ever been before and which seemed almost entirely new to him.

In about ten minutes' time he felt assured that he was now alone. It is true he was cut off from the flat by those there, and could no more return to his home than to the factory, but he had saved his personal liberty, and

his former resolves still persisted. He grew calm once more, and even showed some outward sign of self-assurance as well—in fact, he felt better and safer than at any time during the last few days. There was no one here who looked upon him as a bad man. Those who noticed him at all did so, one and all, with a glance of respect. His outward appearance, therefore, could not have deteriorated in the least. "There, then," he murmured, "Lippke is not so easily defeated. As soon as blood has been shed my dead will have their eyes opened. I dedicated my life to their service, and I shall offer my death to them also. That is the most a man can do."

He took a great step forward to his goal when, having been reminded of it by the goods displayed in a shop-window, he entered the second-hand store to which it belonged and bought an old revolver.

"But already loaded!" he bargained. "I am night-watchman in a factory and must be able to shoot."

They could give him what he wanted, and the weapon was loaded and its mechanism explained, so that it was with perfect self-confidence that he left the dark, cellar-like shop and stepped into daylight again. The weight of the revolver in his pocket seemed a guarantee of absolute certainty, and as it bumped against his hip he thought to himself: "That's all right now; I know I can rely on you!"

He grew more at home with it, and felt more and more that it was part of himself as it lost its metallic chill and took on some of his bodily heat. When he had reached the pitch of being able to look upon the weapon as one of his bodily organs, that, like heart, kidneys or foot, had its own special work to do, he started on his way to Felgentreu's flat. "That's right," he thought with emotion; "I'm coming to her with the legacy—if he is so determined she should have it. But I doubt if it'll give her much pleasure."

His heart was beating regularly, and he had lost both his longing for brandy and all desire to light his pipe. In pathetic gravity, and thinking of his dead, he at last approached the street where the loving couple had their home, found the exact house, looked into the doorway, and passed by it once without entering. "It's not time for him yet," he said to himself. "Just past eleven o'clock. He can't be home before half-past twelve." And on he went in silence.

At any rate, he had seen the house, and that gave, so to speak, a semblance of reality to his project. It began to grow more insistent and to give him more food for thought. How was he actually going to carry "it" out? Caution was necessary. Besides, he could not shoot him from behind; if he wanted to kill him he must attack him face to face. But then there was Felgentreu's cursed open look, without a trace of shame or fear of death to be reckoned with, and that brought an element of uncertainty into the procedure.

On the other hand, the house, for the first time, seemed to give him an instinctive sense of the sin hiding behind its walls, and it was on this thought that his excited imagination now dwelt. Whoever aimed at "him" through his lust would certainly not miss his mark! To go and shoot the healthy young woman, so that she ended her life in a pool of blood, to send a bullet through her brains, to say: "There, now bury your darling!"—the more he thought over it the more he felt that this was a better plan, and one more likely to bring utter ruin into his enemy's life.

He turned round thoughtfully and retraced his steps, often feeling as he went for the revolver and then for his son's pocket-book; both were still there. "One death brings another!" he thought. It was now half-past eleven. He would be certain of finding Alma, as she had to do her cooking. Just "as an experiment," he rang the front-

door bell, stepped into the apartment house, and "at all events" asked the porter for the Felgentreus' flat. It was in the part of the building looking on to the garden, two stories up. A clean passage led to the enclosed court, that was well laid out, wide and spacious. It contained three young poplars, doing exceedingly well and nearly up to the roof gutters. In the second story Lippke saw pretty curtains at every window. All the tenants seemed, without exception, to be respectable people. "Now you shall be avenged, Julius!" was his tragic thought. "And you, too, Stina, poor unfreed soul!" He breathed with difficulty but regularly as he mounted the stairs slowly, but with a certain solemnity of his own. On the second landing he found a white enamel plate, on which stood in printed script the name "Felgentreu." This gave him an odd feeling of surprise, which he could not have explained. His heart beat faster, and the corner of his eyes flashed with that crafty grey light that with him was always a sign of emotional stress. "Usurper!" he muttered with quivering lips. "Takes liberties, lives like a pasha! What shifts I went to with women to keep my family life unstained!" Then he rang the bell with a violence that was an index of the hatred possessing his heart, and stood waiting with firmly closed lips. His mind was absorbed in a pitiless comparison of his own desolate old age with Felgentreu's full and successful prime of life. His hand still held the revolver in his pocket.

But there was not a movement in the flat; it seemed to be empty except for a hidden wave of some intangible atmosphere which he scented with his coarse nose as it forced its way out through the cracks round the door. The fragrance utterly repelled him while at the same time stinging him into action, and he rang again with even greater violence than before. As he was already fairly certain that nobody was at home, he did not hurry to lift his finger from the button. A wild satisfaction

filled him as he heard the sound of the bell re-echo through the empty flat; it seemed to him like the piteous cry of the victim of some sudden attack, and gave him a certain sense of satisfaction. But then he was again struck by the prosperous respectability of Felgentreu's name-plate, that awoke his envy and roused the impatience which now began to torture him. His self-composure showed signs of giving way, and at last he turned away from the door with a feeling of disappointment.

"Wherever you try to seize anything you find your fist shuts down on naught," he muttered in angry annoyance. "I wonder if the despot will be much upset if I send a bullet through his little friend? Ah! I know what will happen. He'll hand me over to justice and then take another, some Emma or . . ." Struck by a sudden thought, he stopped short. Through his narrowed eyelids he gazed into vacancy, and then nodded solemnly with a tragic gesture. "That's it," he murmured, as he waved his arm in consternation and stumbled on again. "I clear my son's promised bride out of his way so that he can get hold of my daughter. I have had a narrow escape of attacking an innocent woman."

Half-stupefied, he looked up. He felt befooled and doubtful of the very foundations of his existence. His pulses vibrated in his anguish. With bent head he had crossed the garden court and had reached the entrance-gate, when he met a distinguished-looking couple coming to the house which he had just left. It was Felgentreu returning with Alma from the doctor's, as she had felt unwell. She had been ordered entire rest in bed for the next few days, after which he would see her again. They were just discussing the necessary domestic arrangements when old Lippke stood before them as suddenly as if he had sprung out of the ground. Alma turned deathly white, and the hand lying on Emil's arm told him how frightened she was. For a few seconds all three

stood uneasily scrutinizing each other without a word. Alma seemed to have grown, not only as a consequence of her condition, but from a general increase in weight and dignity.

Lippke's face showed a hectic flush and his eyes gave the impression that he was squinting. The colour now began to fade from Felgentreu's cheeks, and his forehead showed two deep vertical lines that very rarely made their appearance there. At last he was the first to break the silence.

"Have you been up to see us?" he asked, still speaking in calm, self-controlled tones. At the same time he could not but be struck by the desolation and timidity in Lippke's appearance.

"Yes, I was up there," the old man retorted, after a last pause, with evident malice in his voice. This frank look of Felgentreu's, "without a trace of shame or fear of death," tormented him even more than he had feared and soon reduced him to quivering fury. "As an old and sincere friend of the family, I wanted to pay a visit to the expectant mother, not thinking that the gentleman and lady would be gone for their morning stroll."

He turned his malicious squint from Emil to Alma. Her full breasts—she was no longer wearing corsets—revealing at every moment her physical condition, the increased breadth of shoulders and hips, every distinctively feminine feature about her, as well as the satisfied sex instinct that her face so unmistakably expressed—all this he saw, looking with sharp, critical glances out of the corners of his eyes, an inspection that Alma endured with uneasy aversion. Her heart beat fast as she realized the serious import of his sudden appearance here. Her look of complete satisfaction with life gradually gave place to one of hatred and a motherly woman's fear for the child that lay under her heart and for its father. Meantime Felgentreu replied, and his voice seemed to

Then Emil made all kinds of oracular statements about the hopes of youth, had a nap by his wife's side, and afterwards proudly escorted her—he in his best black coat and she in a light blouse cut low at the neck—to the Tiergarten as she had planned.

In the evening they supped at Sicchen's on aitchbone and sauerkraut with a glass of Munich beer, and he presented his wife with a bunch of flowers. Afterwards she went with him to his bodega, where they shared a little bottle of Marsala. At last, at his wife's request, Emil gave her a true account of his play with Alma, nor did she give him reason to regret doing so, although the incident made her jealous. They ended the day as a good married couple should on the anniversary of their first courtship, and once more he lay in her arms so enthralled in the passion of his love as entirely to forget her forty-five years. He persisted, however, in his new rôle of father.

CHAPTER IV

As we have said, Meta had already found the one slipper in the kitchen, and Felgentreu replaced the shorter pipe after Easter by one that he had wanted for some time past—a really long pipe with a cherry-wood stem, adorned by a red, white and black tassel and two fighting stags on the china bowl. To expedite its colouring, he smoked it in the dinner-hour as well. It was, of course, important when it was once filled to finish it to the very end and not to leave it only half burnt out; this and many other important points he duly emphasized to his women-folk, just as he expounded to them the political happenings at home and abroad. As a well-informed industrialist and public speaker—which he had been in earlier years—

her suddenly weary, with a note of indignation modifying its usual warm and cordial tones.

"We had gone to consult the doctor about Alma's health," he informed the old man. "You could not have expected me to be at home so soon. Or is your watch so fast as all that? If so, you must put it right." He spoke with some heat and his eyes flashed with eagerness for the fray.

"Maybe something else will be put right, too," Lippke retorted, picking up the gauntlet with a grim nod of his head. "My daughter's run off. I wanted to have a look to see if she was in your harem."

Alma looked up sharply and seemed about to give a violent answer, but Emil had already taken up a counter-attack.

"If you treat your daughter in such a way that she has to run away for safety, I can only pity her," he said, in the same tone as before. "We've long felt sorry for the child. But we have no idea where she is—if that is the reason why you have made your appearance here."

"Of course it's my reason!" the old man retorted, with half-shut eyes. "What else should I come for? Perhaps you don't believe me. Suppose we let bygones be bygones," he suddenly proposed, with a desolate gesture of his hand. "Let's live in peace. I must have the girl again, you understand. So you'll give me Clara's address, eh?"

"I don't understand you," Felgentreu said, with no signs of reconciliation. "You think that I've hidden Clara somewhere or other, and then you come at a time when, in your opinion, I shall be out of the house to get the address from Alma. How does that all fit in?"

"Now, then, not so masterful!" Lippke warned him angrily. "Perhaps I wanted to bring your paramour a greeting from the dead who sleep in the Lord."

Again he squinted over in Alma's direction. "Well, you adulterer," he continued, as he turned again defiantly to Felgentreu, "here I am. Now remember the defeat you were going to give me from which I should never recover. Where is my wife? Where is my son? Where have you got my daughter?"

"Mind, Emil!" Alma said suddenly, speaking with difficulty. "He has a revolver in his pocket!"

Turning to Lippke, she gloomily observed: "So you were going to attack me with that in the flat, I suppose? Perhaps I was to go after Julius—with another man's child! Well, here I am!" She stepped before him, her great dark eyes flashing with anger. "Don't imagine I am frightened!" At last her woman's wrath completely overmastered her. Her eyes suddenly darkened to grey, her full lips twitched in hate and contempt. "What do we owe you?" she screamed. "What do you run after us for? Do you want money, maybe, to drown yourself in drink? Don't say another word now—that only insults us! Just shoot! You've come, haven't you, to shoot? In any case life is no longer any pleasure under such conditions as these!"

She was boiling with rage and shaken with her impotence to quell the remorseless lust for vengeance that was so evident in the icy look he fixed upon her—a look that, moreover, awoke in her an agonizing consciousness of her own guilt in the matter. Once more all the ghosts of the past appeared before her, and made her shiver in the midst of the fire of abuse that she was hurling forth. A melancholy expression of doubt passed across her eyes, and she again felt all the foundations of her existence shaking beneath her feet. Lippke had not the slightest idea of this victory for him. He only heard and accepted her insults; he had developed a terrible facility for such action. Emil saw him turn as grey as the wall against which he was standing, and for a moment he

thought the old man would attack Alma with his fists, and instinctively assumed an attitude of defence.

"Ah yes, pride and loose living grow on one bush," the old man hissed. "But pride comes before a fall. You have forgotten that in your performance. If I go to the police, you'll soon find things not quite so pleasant for you. It only needs just a word from me, and your love-nest will be pulled to bits. Do you understand?"

"Coarse vulgarity I never understand." Two red spots flared on her cheeks as she flashed out her retort without giving Emil time to answer. "You are the first to insult me in my present condition. In the past he used to persecute me with his improper advances." She turned in her wrath to Emil. "As his daughter-in-law, I should never have known an hour's peace from him."

Old Lippke continued for a moment to stare without a word at the contemptuous young woman into which the shy girl of early days had now developed.

Then a low bestial howl issued from his throat; he thrust his hand fiercely into his pocket as he panted in broken accents: "You've talked your life away! In the name of all the honourable dead who rest in the Lord, this is your end, you jade!"

But he had not reckoned on the holes in his pocket, in which the revolver was now entangled. Mad with fury at the undisguised triumph that still shone in the eyes of the expectant mother and at the almost surprised but very grave scrutiny of his enemy, the old man tugged away with the help of his other hand as well. First they heard the lining tear, and then the crack of the metal, but he did not desist, and suddenly he had got his weapon out. At that moment Felgentreu left his place and took a rapid step towards him. The next instant Lippke received a blow on the head, under which he collapsed without a sound, like an empty sack.

"If you weren't so wretched, I should have to kick

you as well!" Emil, every nerve quivering with his tremendous excitement, said to his prostrate foe. But he was beyond all hearing. He lay there limply, just as the blow had knocked him down, his body lying over his bent arm and the hand that still held the revolver, his face on the dirty pavement and his knees drawn up as if in self-protection. But just as Felgentreu was beginning to wonder what he had better do with him next, an unlooked-for movement stirred his body. Suddenly he began—with a certain inner feeling of hate—to pull himself together. Then he scrambled like some four-footed beast to his feet, and in a flash he was up and taking to his heels. He reeled on and away like a drunken man, knocking against the houses and stumbling over the slightest impediment. A dim, unconscious instinct of self-preservation urged him as usual to flee this place. Felgentreu was just going to say, "He won't get far with a revolver in his hand," when the old man began to feel for his coat pocket. Without pausing for a second in his headlong course, his fumbling, trembling hands managed to get the weapon into hiding. At the top of the street he disappeared from the sight of the other two in the surging stream of foot-passengers and vehicles.

CHAPTER XXIV

MUCH upset by what had taken place, Felgentreu and Alma at last proceeded to their own flat. They were glad that the incident had not attracted public attention, as, until the great midday stream of workers returned to dinner, the street was almost deserted. They had no sense of victory. Felgentreu, indeed, was almost overcome by a desperate attack of weary annoyance with life in his native country, and a cloud had again fallen over his

life that would not soon be dissipated. His heart cried aloud for freedom and dignity, and only his love for the beautiful child of Nature at his side could still outweigh this last emotional upset.

But he soon forgot both himself and his own distress, as all his thoughts were turned on her. She was suddenly attacked by such physical and mental distress that it was all he could do to get her up to the flat. She went straight to bed, but she was scarcely there before a shivering fit was at once followed by premature pains; these were accompanied by such an access of terror that Emil had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to let him leave her for a moment to send some neighbour for help. When he came back she was trembling and turned away from him, but in the burning torture of her pains and mortal fear she again threw her arms round his neck, and did not let go until she had another hysterical spasm, followed by a sharp heart attack.

As soon as she had recovered from that, the struggle began all over again: rigor, fever, cramp, mortal terror, screams, dumb despair, flying pulse—all following each other in overwhelming speed. It seemed as though she wished to show once more of what she was capable before she gave up the struggle; bit, groaned, clutched him with such desperation that he too was half-killed; dug her nails into his flesh, adjured him by all that was holy not to leave her, pushed him away in utter despair to bury her face in the pillows in a fit of hopeless tears.

In all this mortal agony Felgentreu thought to himself that a woman's passion and pain in her travail was a sure index to the depth and fire of her love, and he did but reverence the more—if that, indeed, were possible—the human nature revealed in her. He got a clearer conception now of what it was, and its relation to the scheme of this world's development, than ever before, and it added to his religion an element that it had lacked until now.

Actuated partly by his deep sympathy with her suffering, and partly by a desire to divert her thoughts from it, he said to her encouragingly:

"Never mind, dear Alma." He was referring to the event now taking place weeks before its time, which, in his absolute inexperience, he viewed without the slightest misgiving. "Have no fear, my dove; all the mighty forces of Nature are working with you." Taking fresh heart himself, he philosophically went on to explain to her: "Heaven cannot send new life too quickly to people such as us. So much death and parting must be followed by the marvel of human birth. As soon as a baby lifts its voice here former things will be past and powerless"; and as he spoke he tried to give her physical help as well. "Drink a little cognac," he proposed, "to cheer your dear heart again." She drank greedily in her desire to live, and grew a little calmer.

"A man, now," he mused—"well, he has his value too; but a woman who bears a little one is the very centre of creation. I'm sure of that now. This evening I shall kiss both your hands, my sunbeam," he announced optimistically. "You will have made a father of me, and then you shall make your choice between a ruby ring or a gold brooch. You can have them both if you manage it all nicely—a new dress as well. And as soon as you are ready to go out again, we'll look for our lordly villa."

Her unrest came on again. She refused fresh brandy, but began to stretch out imploring hands once more.

"Do you want to sit up?" he asked anxiously. "My poor darling, how your beautiful white teeth chatter! There, there, have your cry out on my breast. That's right, that's right—hold on to me; you can bite a little, too, if you like, my poor, hot little child."

At last the bell rang, and he had another struggle to tear himself away. "Stop here," she whispered, as eagerly as in her love's first passion, and her eyes were full of

fear as she clung to him with an ever-tightening grip. "Don't go away, Emil, my heart! Don't leave me alone! Not alone, not alone! I have to die, whatever you do. It is death standing outside the door."

"Just the very opposite, my Alma," he exclaimed, quite pale from sympathy and anxious love. "It is life standing at the door. Let me go, child; that is help coming for you. There—they are ringing again." He freed himself forcibly from her grasp. "Be good, my sunbeam," he entreated. "Dearest, I shall only be a second."

It was the midwife. As she saw and heard her face grew very serious. Next the doctor came, and was not at all satisfied with what he found. Alma's heart was racing and her pulse was too weak; now it was plain how much she had worried secretly all through those months of waiting. Then there was hæmorrhage and various other irregularities that called for precautionary treatment. Alma drove out her lover rather than let him see what was done, then cried out to him to come back that she might not die without him, and when it was all over she lay for a time silent and trembling, her life ebbing away. Emil, in terrible distress, was a silent spectator of this undreamt-of horror. He heard her whisper: "Don't go away. It is getting so dark. Why do they hammer so?"

The tiny son, fruit of her womb, flesh of her flesh, lay at her side breathing softly, and quite able to live in spite of having come two months before his time. She had cast one long questioning look upon him and then no more—it was a welcome and farewell together. An unfathomable look of sorrow on her young, pallid face told Felgentreu everything as he felt her hand grow slowly cold in his. People came and went, but he had neither eyes nor ears for any but her. On the chair by the bed lay the clothes she had just been wearing, the dainty garments with the blue ribbons that he had liked so much. She had even adorned the white iron bedsteads

with yellow bows. For the last four weeks a horseshoe, with the same decoration, had also been hanging there, though neither of them had ever mentioned it. On the bedside table lay an Ullstein book, a well-known cheap edition of popular literature, a sugary, sentimental tale of love and misfortune. Alma had always preferred books with a sad ending because she thought they were truer to life. By its side stood an opened box of sweets that he had brought her only the day before.

After seven o'clock—he never noticed it was night until someone brought him a light—he sat there alone; the women had gone to other duties when they could be no further use here. They meant to come again to look to the baby, for to-day nothing more was needed. The midwife, too, had other work, but was coming once again before night to see to the child. The little lad was dark like his mother, but had his father's brown eyes, which, when open, already showed strange gravity and intelligence. Felgentreu always felt deeply moved whenever he caught sight of this far-away, abstracted look in the eyes of this new-born son of his. Suddenly he felt he had no further interest in the event to which he had looked forward as to a new epoch in his life. Now and again it stirred; the tiny lungs worked quickly and with the utmost regularity. It had strikingly long fingers and a long, well-developed head. In short, there was much promise and breeding about the little fellow, but compared with his mother, who lay there in the ever-increasing rigidity of her unutterably tragic death, he was but a tiny glimmering star by the ruins of a mighty darkened sun. This Felgentreu saw and recognized, although he did not understand it. He accepted with hesitation what had happened, but was utterly unable to bring it into line with his former experiences; they were one thing and this was another—terrible, hitherto unknown; and although it was finished and over, yet

heavy with portent for all the future. It was, indeed, utter destruction—the great, incomprehensible mystery. His heart lay crushed under a mountain of grief that grew higher with every passing hour.

“And what have I not already endured for her sake?” he mused in his desolation. He ran over mentally such words as love, loyalty, happiness, hope, magnanimity, piety, faith, liberty, but they were all no more than empty sounds. In comparison with this one great reality every other faded into an *ignis fatuus*, died away into a smothered breath. Even a far-off land was devoid of all meaning for him now, and the new home he had but just found was a thing of the past. Nothing existed for him but his dead love; he was lost in a vast sea of utter indifference, and his heart was still with her, as far as a mortal heart can follow those who pass beyond the veil of life. That he did not yet realize the depth of his longing nor transmute it into a sense of the destruction of his own life too was only due to the fact that he had not until now given one thought to himself since her death.

The bell rang again. He got up wearily without a sound, and filled with that heaviness only known to those who have sat by the lifeless body of some loved one, to go and open the door. Thinking it was one of the women, he pulled back the bolt without looking up, turned to put on the vestibule light for her, and was going back to his dead, when he noticed that the visitor did not enter. In some astonishment he looked round, and by the light of the little lamp recognized old Lippke, who was standing there without a cap and with a torn collar, yet in spite of his soiled clothes there was about him a certain air of silent solemnity which quite evidently made him feel restrained and ill at ease. After Felgentreu had turned right round and silently observed him for a time, he dropped his solemnity and showed without any

disguise the perverse perplexity of a man on the borderland of insanity. His eyes were dull and sunken; his face had in the course of one afternoon become so thin that its lines and features were more like those of a so-called death's head than of a living being. His lips were parted as if in entreaty, though he uttered not a word. But Felgentreu understood what it meant and what he was asking from him. "Then come right in," he said, resigning himself to it, "and see what is happening."

The old man obeyed, slowly shutting the door behind him. Irresolutely, and with an air of dejection, he approached his former enemy; his submissive bearing and the silent misery and surrender in his movements showed that his enmity was now completely a thing of the past.

"So you have ventured to come when I was here?" Felgentreu went on in a tone of sympathy. "Just walk on; you will frighten no one. Alma is asleep."

He broke off, and avoided Lippke's look of inquiry as he passed by him to go into the sitting-room. But the old man stopped short on the threshold and sniffed the air in consternation.

"Has anything happened here?" he asked in stifled tones, as his eyes glanced round in hasty interrogation. "It smells so of—carbolic. Felgentreu, tell me—is anything wrong with Alma? It is so quiet here, too."

He stopped short in guilty self-consciousness, and for a time both men stood silently facing one another in the room, Lippke with bowed head and uneasy upward glances, Felgentreu motionless, with pale, averted face.

"Sit down," he said at last, pointing to a chair by the table. "No doubt you are tired."

Lippke sat down as he was told, with his back to the open door of the bedroom. But he soon began to alter his position, for he felt the threatening presence of death behind him, and under its disturbing influence he moved

he had an encyclopædia to which he referred on all doubtful points. Often, too, it corroborated statements of his that had been disputed by his wife, or even Alma; never once did it contradict them, for if he had consciously drawn on his imagination and had talked at random, he would search its pages for a time and then say the matter was not mentioned, his usual statement when the book and he differed. Often, however, he would read out fluently the exact opposite of what he found on the printed page. Meta, who for the sake of their home-life made silent but unceasing efforts to restrain his mania for reading and culture, was to a certain extent the implacable enemy of his book-case, and since their marriage had, by inconspicuous but effective methods, prevented any considerable increase of his library. She was a woman who, as far as her intellectual life went, lived for the present moment, and judged human nature from the point of view of daily human intercourse. She regarded with the greatest suspicion his Darwin, Marx, Rousseau, Engels, Haeckel, Bebel and Kautsky; his revolutionary leanings and propagandist schemes were, indeed, as Emil justly felt, kindly but firmly suppressed—sacrificed, so to speak, on the altar of family life. She had long since made clear to him what daily life necessitated, and to this he had to submit, in spite of somewhat restive remonstrance. Nor did he find an ally in Alma, in spite of her youth; she had too little desire for education, and was too lacking both in curiosity and enthusiasm. In spite of all this, however, it would be quite a mistake to look upon Felgentreu as either foolish or hen-pecked. His mind was always at work and kept alight the fire of his hidden enthusiasm. If he read less, his intellectual ideals grew in intensity. Only it often happened that his restless imagination made him stray into wrong paths or that his tendency to revolt, growing ever stronger under continual repression, would find a vent in flights of fancy as fleeting

and moved his chair until he faced the danger. He made no attempt to answer Emil's last question. He had passed a terrible afternoon, and scarcely knew what he had really done or where he had been. It had taken him a long time simply to recover from the blow and to collect his thoughts again, and even longer to recover from the recent "defeat" that returning memory showed him in all its pitiless reality. His one prospect now was death. If he had not the courage for that, he would fall into the hands of the police. All his grand ideas of avenging his family honour, of bringing satisfaction to the dead "who rest in the Lord," and so on, had vanished. By using up the last of his supply of customary curses and the little remnant he still had left of a belief in his own dignity, he managed indeed to spur on his worried dying imagination to provide one more picture of a bloodthirsty murder, to which for want of any better support he clung for a time. "Either face to face or from behind," he had murmured in a monotonous, half-mad whisper. "There must be a judgment." He had divided his time fairly equally between the streets and the drinking bars. But towards evening all his money had gone, and when once he understood that his condition entered on a new stage.

He reasoned it all out quite clearly and simply. He could only get more money by fetching it from home, but the entrance to his flat was barred by "those others." A week's wages was due to him at the works, but that he had lost. If he had some money, he mused, coming back to himself a little, he would have time, too. The nearer it got to seven o'clock—his usual hour for beginning his nightly duties—the more restless he grew. Again and again he caught himself starting on his way to work, and pulled himself back as from the edge of a precipice. His rounds of inspection, the usual incidents, the look of the factory in moonlight or on wet and

stormy nights, even the bell in the watchman's room—all this became the object of a desire that dragged and pulled him more and more irresistibly, until the blood seemed sucked from his veins and the very marrow dried within his bones. With helpless despair he felt his strength failing. His loneliness, too, increased as soon as he could get no more schnapps. He could get no comfort in his sorrow for his family, and he felt a piteous longing for their graves. In addition to all this there was an oppressive ache in his head as the result of the blow from Felgentreu's fist, and a terrible inner emptiness, as he was utterly starving.

Gradually the workers coming home from all sides to their evening's leisure began to meet him. He pictured to himself Felgentreu going home and sitting soberly down to his table in full security. Not a trace of that brutal, revengeful grin was to be seen on his calm, clever face. The Felgentreu of his murderous designs had suddenly vanished, and his place was taken by a sympathetic, sane man, who, moreover, was the last remaining acquaintance of the happy days of his vanished past. It was raining a little, and he began to feel cold. He needed help and safety, if such things could exist for him. Felgentreu's form stood out more and more convincingly before his eyes as his last refuge from despair—a kind of home, so to speak. Felgentreu, with all his experience in complicated questions, would surely know what to do. Let him have Julius's legacy in return, then everyone would get his share. And from this decision he did not waver. He began, too, to notice that his appearance attracted attention, and this cowed and shamed him terribly; he still had a small remnant of pride of office left somewhere in his composition. He began to make secret attempts to improve his looks a little by a pull here, a rub there, and was, moreover, careful to get on the dark side of the streets. When he caught sight of

the house and of the place where he had lain in the dirt, he felt the world was very dark again. Yet as such thoughts could bring him no help, but only sternly show him the eternal damnation in him that is the result of moral ruin, he bent his pride once more and rang the bell. He then crept timidly into the house, and, considering his really terrible condition, he managed to make some show of dignity until his eyes again fell on the white enamel name-plate. That made him realize that he was ringing at the door of his mortal enemy; it was this that caused the perverse perplexity in which he appeared before Felgentreu, and which only left him as he realized what he had brought to pass here.

"How—how—did that happen?" The question came with great difficulty after a lengthy silence.

"Premature confinement," Felgentreu said; and after a pause he added: "For some time lately she was not as she should have been."

Lippke heard Felgentreu's consideration for him in this remark. After another long silence he asked: "And the child?"

"The child is alive. They say he is almost the size of a normal child—a little boy."

Lippke began to grow uneasy when he heard not a trace of hatred or thirst for revenge in Emil's words. This worried him, until at last he broke out:

"Well—and what do you mean to do with me now? It's my doing that your happiness is destroyed, so something, of course, will have to be done."

Again he fell into distressed silence. Felgentreu, too, did not speak for a time, and when he did answer his voice sounded tired and pained but not unfriendly.

"Don't say that, Anton! If she had not been ill, she would have been able to bear your action."

It took Lippke some time to believe his ears as he listened to this answer; then he suddenly began to tear

at his pocket to get out the revolver. With an awkward movement he laid it on the table between himself and Felgentreu.

"So that you shouldn't think I—mean to get myself out of the trouble," he said.

Felgentreu had watched him intently. Now he looked attentively at the weapon, a heavy, half-rusty army revolver of an antiquated pattern that Felgentreu had used in his cavalry days. Some sort of memory flitted across his sad features, but the next moment his expression showed how intent he was again on the matter in hand.

"Have you handled the weapon—since then?" he asked. And as Lippke shook his head in surprise, he fixed a keen glance on him and remarked: "You have forgotten that it is still at safety. The bullet would not have gone off."

Perplexed by his thoughts, he looked away again, and immediately after he got up and began to walk round the room, for he found it difficult to sit exactly opposite to this old man, who could feel nothing but pain at sight of him.

"What else can I do for you?" he inquired. "You didn't come here now about that." He vaguely pointed to the revolver. "I know nothing about your daughter; I have told you that already. If there is anything else, just say what it is." He was anxious to be alone with his dead once more; the presence of this sad figure disturbed the sanctity of death, which now should have been felt.

"No, there's nothing else," the old man declared. "I only wanted to hear my sentence from you. . . ."

He remained seated, however, and Felgentreu heard his words with some surprise.

"What sentence do you expect from me?" he somewhat coldly demanded, not understanding the old man's meaning. "Let there be an end to all that, Anton. Can't

you live a simple, modest life, then, like other people! If it were you only who had to pay the bill!"

Lippke's eyes began to flash again.

"You think that because I caused the death of both my wife and my son," he said suspiciously. "Yes, but that's my fate, with the best of motives, to destroy all around me. That's why I think you should take the revolver and send a bullet through my head. I haven't the pluck to do it myself."

"You have always been a closed book to me," Emil answered sadly. "I understand that you are wretched. Who feels quite happy in life? But if your God in whom you believe does not help you, who else can?"

The child stirred in the bedroom, and Emil stopped as if arrested by a sudden idea. For a time he stood wide-eyed, lost in thought, then he began, still with that fresh thought in his eyes, to speak once more.

"You say you have destroyed everything round you. I have destroyed, too. Perhaps you thought I would try to excuse myself with lies. I have destroyed you with my sympathy and ruined you by my determined egoism. My marriage, too, has gone to bits, but Meta—well, Meta I cannot touch; she stands above destruction and will bring her world again into its wonted order. She is in touch with a great power—the fear of God. She is the mother of true humanity. But perhaps these, too, are only empty words. . . ."

In the short silence that ensued Felgentreu stood by the sideboard looking in devotion and overwhelming sorrow at Alma's photograph, which some weeks since had been put there as a companion picture to Meta's. Lippke watched him out of the corner of his eye; then he glanced at the weapon on the table, and a malicious expression again crept back into his face as he said in a tone of secret defiance:

"Why empty words? Something must be behind them.

Say more about your fear of God and humanity. Tell me what's to happen now if you are not going to bring me to judgment. Show your sympathy."

Felgentreu slowly turned from the dear pictures on the wall and faced his tormentor. His eyes grew troubled and anxious again; his features spoke of dull grief and quickly began to show signs of utter weariness.

"Listen, Anton," he replied, with an effort at self-control that he tried to conceal, "if the death of others does not convince you. Shall we ourselves be equal in death or not?"

He looked at him frankly, without a trace of fear on his face, and Lippke, conscious of his own mortality, turned away his eyes.

"Except for the different style of burying that money gives us, we'll all rot into the same dust," he retorted somewhat uncomfortably. "I agree to that so far."

"Well, that's something, at any rate," Emil said, his voice betraying his sickness of heart. "Now, there is the threat of death; between us lies a loaded revolver, and again you don't know why. It lies there because I struck down an unfortunate man into the mud at the moment of his greatest misery. But possibly you think I'm only talking to save my own neck. So we'll say no more of that, and speak instead of the new-born babe lying there without a mother, since that is surely the most urgent matter of all. You must do me the favour to carry it now at once to Meta. I might send one of the women, but I would much rather have some trusty friend who knows how matters stand. You can wash here, and I'll give you a collar and a cap. You'll take with you, too, a letter that I'll be quick and write. It is nine o'clock now, so you'll get there before they lock up for the night. In any case, a new-born child can always find entrance, because no one knows what heaven-sent saviour may not be coming in that guise."

Without waiting for Lippke's assent or paying any heed to his attitude to the proposal, Emil at once set about his preparations, moving to and fro in silent self-possession, doing everything in a certain fervour that arose from his ever-growing thirst for peace and release from earthly toils as he continued to dwell on his last spiritual thought of the heaven-sent Redeemer.

"Millions of hearts are now, indeed, expecting Him," he said, as he came out of the kitchen, "and some time He must appear. So no one can know from what womb He may come." He set down a kitchen chair and put a basin full of water on it. "You'll get soap and a towel directly. This place is full of terror and threats of ill to come," he went on, with a shake of his head as he stepped to the sideboard, in the lower part of which he knew the clean linen was kept. He laid the towel over the back of the chair as he said encouragingly:

"Take off your coat, Anton. The cold water will do you good. Make yourself quite at home. Think of our poor bodies, now," he exhorted, as he returned with collar and tie. "Christ died for our souls, but who saves our bodies? And how will anyone redeem his soul without saving his body too? There's the collar, Anton. I think it will fit you. My heart is heavy; we are all lost—all sinking together into the swampy depths. You don't need to take many baby things with you. Meta will come over this evening or first thing to-morrow morning." He seemed entirely to forget for a moment his original intention, and stood there, his head bent in thought. "I tell you the first sight of this little child has upset me all the evening, with the thought of its unsullied purity. That's why I want Meta to bring it up. Her noble character—you see—and then her piety and experience. I was spoilt already when I came into her hands. I made a will in those quiet evenings, when Alma had gone to bed early. It is all written there: all my thoughts about

liberty, Nature, the independence of the soul, and the rest. She must bring him up in accordance with that. I cannot do it. I have no power to resist evil. And I shall emigrate from this old world. That is my sentence, Anton. Now we'll make haste so that you can start."

With fresh self-control in his face he went back to the bedroom, where his big hands began to turn over with extreme care the contents of Alma's chest of drawers. Lippke, who meanwhile had scarcely stirred, watched him incessantly in spite of a constant annoying twitch in his eyes, and whilst Felgentreu was showing his capability in these domestic matters, bringing water and towels, opening and shutting drawers and cupboards, the old man had a dim vision of his son, who had been snatched away too soon ever to reach the happiness of such a home. His heart filled with a father's sorrow, full of unconscious envy, and he thought with sad emotion of the pride and bliss that such an event in his son's life would have given his own poor wife, and, almost groaning aloud with a sense of his loneliness, his mind dwelt on the destruction of his family, the ruin of his home, his last child wandering he knew not where, the loss of his work, the reproachful shades of the dead, who were still waiting for him to justify himself. All the time this well-to-do, "middle-class" man had only thought of himself, lived for the gratification of his lusts, made fine speeches, given presents of fruit and wine, snatched away the girl for himself, helped to bury Stina, entrapped Julius, set Clara free—all this done by one person till he stood above everything, and Lippke, knocked down by his fist, lay far below in the mud of the street. Now he, Lippke, was to carry the child of his adultery to that deserted woman—the deceived father as messenger to the despised, insulted wife!

He felt inclined to laugh, but at the same time misery clutched at his throat with an iron grasp. What was to be

done with the legacy now that she was dead? A pale, perpendicular light on one side of him caught his eye; it was the white-curtained window, but to him it seemed a closed door, and in a moment the room re-echoed with the terrible sound that had driven him from his own flat. Instinctively he stood up. Felgentreu looked out inquiringly from the spook-like light of the room of death, and Lippke, scarcely able to stand steadily on his feet, motioned him back. The old man would have liked to scream aloud, but the most he could achieve was a dry sob that reminded the hearer of the short agonized cry that Julius had uttered. To add to his distress, there was an indisputable, unspeakable sanctity about the dead woman in there such as he had not seen in the case of his wife or Julius either, such a radiance of secret love that he nearly lost all mastery of himself, and began to think of things against which he had been fighting tooth and nail. With a panting sound, he threw himself on to the water as if it were his native element, and gave himself a lengthy and most thorough wash, for as long as he was busy with soap and water he did not need to see or hear anything else. Then he carefully dried himself, as if he felt he owed his body an apology for such treatment, and spent a long time arranging his thin grey hair to best advantage over his bald head. He combed his tangled beard, buttoned the collar that Felgentreu had laid out for him, fixed his tie, and put on his cap. At last he stood in the room with no more conscious thought than if he had been dying, although outwardly he seemed dignified and conscious of his own worth as he waited for the letter that Emil was still writing. Now and again he cast a timid side-glance towards the bedroom. Now she, too, was dead, and yet he did not feel that she had gone to join his own dead son. "Ruined to no purpose," he thought. Then he listened to hear if the death-rattle wasn't there

again, gave a quick glance out of the corner of his eye at the white curtains that had so terrified him just before, and again he made painful efforts to think of nothing and to keep all his fancies at arm's length. Only his fatherly affection now and then sent a fleeting thought to the pale, silent embodiment of love lying in that room there; this, and this alone, awoke in him a trace of timid gentleness and admiration. But such feelings were but the frosty flowers that death's icy hand traced on the dim windows of his old age.

Felgentreu's letter ran as follows:

DEAR META,

It is all over. Alma has died in premature childbirth. I now send you the child by the hands of a reliable messenger. Do not be astonished at anything. I always said you would outlive us both. And do not think there is any lesson in all this. I am brought to utter ruin but not conquered. Give the child a kindly welcome; it has need of love. I feel as though there must be something new and out of the ordinary in him. The clothes and everything else you will find here to-morrow, and I now send you the key of the flat so that you can get in. I have never wavered in my confidence in you and in my belief in liberty. May your God—if He exists—one day solve this mystery for us all.

As always,

Your EMIL.

N.B.—The child must now be your all.

At last Lippke could take the little creature in all its warm wraps in his arms and start off with key and letter. Felgentreu saw him out of the flat, and listened from above until his footsteps died away in the front passage and the house-door shut behind him; then he turned back with his last thoughts into the flat. At first he passed for a time through the rooms, looking around with his mind full of silent, ever-changing thoughts and memories, as he took his last farewell. So many moments of happiness, so many of passion, flashed out of the dying light

and unsubstantial as the rings of smoke that floated above his pipe.

He took great pleasure in his new fatherhood and the establishment of corresponding relations between him and the beautiful girl; he made a beginning by a few presents, after consultation with his wife. For Meta was once more the centre round which his whole life revolved, and it was with her that he discussed with eager love the further development of his new paternal attitude to Alma. Since Easter he had called Meta "mother," and spoke of himself as "father" whenever he talked to the girl. "Bring your father his slippers, and be quick about it," or "Now, don't let mother find it out, my child." Frau Felgentreu was inclined to accept the new relationship with gentle mockery, for she was in no way weary of the old one yet. Alma had suddenly assumed an importance in the family, without which they had managed very well until now. For a week or longer—about the time he took to colour up his new pipe—he supported Meta loyally in all she said about the Lippkes, whom Alma had again not invited during the Easter trip, and emphatically agreed with the "mother's" decision that their "daughter" must come to a clear understanding of how matters stood between her and the Lippkes. But when his pipe had acquired its first tinge of colour, he began to be less emphatic at the discussion of the question. The next time he said not a word and ended by changing his former opinion.

"Well, but if the lass hasn't quite made up her mind yet about that suitor," he objected one evening. "Such matters can only too easily turn out badly. As far back as Easter I said to her: 'Now, child, think over the step a good seven times before you take it.' Let her take her time, mother!"

The rain outside was dashing against the window-panes and the stormy wind rattling their iron frames; fire was crackling in the stove, and the gas-jets sang in unison.

once more with smiles of joy. The heavy shadow left behind by Lippke, the deadly mortification of his relentless hate, which superstition alone had driven back into its lair, like a wolf with bristling back and low snarls, to lie in wait for him again—all this he dismissed from his mind, and with it, too, any sin on his part against the old man. His one thought was release—liberty. He could, moreover, see a gentle smile beginning on the lips of his dead darling since he had been alone with her. Her hands, with their matronly fingers, were folded lightly, almost tenderly, in one another. Her loosened hair shone like burnished gold in the reflected light; it still seemed alive, and Emil started a little every time he noticed it. But gradually his sense of longing grew more and more overpowering; his soul started back from the loveless future as a horse rears at some sudden terror. His whole being began to weep and wail and then to scream for the tender love of this beautiful being—a passion of love that had already faded and was beginning to disappear. By degrees all lost its brightness and reality, and the secret of the dead alone appeared like some northern light on his horizon to beckon to him in real earnest. He had an anxious sense of her loneliness as he felt the first stirrings of her fear, and knew that she was looking back at him, her large eyes filled with troubled inquiry. He quietly lifted the revolver from the table. His experienced hands cocked and examined it; it seemed to him in perfect order. He calmly walked to the bedroom, placed a chair opposite his darling, and sat down. Once more he fixed his eyes intently on the face that had so often charmed him in life, the first lover's look in death. Then he put the barrel to his temples and pulled the trigger. He waited a moment in perplexity, for no bullet came. He quickly tried the second cartridge, with the same result. In a paroxysm of fright and deepest consternation, he tried the remaining four cartridges in rapid

succession and just as fruitlessly, until the cylinder was in the same position as at first. He gave the last cartridge a little longer to go off, then in his disappointment removed the weapon from his head as his face slowly took on a pallor that was almost green. An indescribable feeling of weariness of life and disgust overmastered him, and his eyes expressed a horror which they had never known in all his life before. His thoughts flew back involuntarily to Lippke. "If I do not die," he thought in a flash, "I shall fall a living victim to his corruption." With a silent sob of despair he turned round the muzzle of the revolver to examine the barrel, and his thumb almost unconsciously released the trigger-guard once more. There was a sudden flash and he heard a sharp report. A terrible pain thrilled through his brain; he heard a frightful scream—his own; then all grew dark and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Meta came home later than usual she found an old man sitting on the top step outside her door holding a tiny baby well wrapped up in his arms. He did not move, but looked at her with blinking eyes—critically examining her, she felt—then got up stiffly with evident difficulty to let her pass. He had aged so much and was such a wreck of his former self that she did not recognize him; with a woman's natural glance of inquiry at the little bundle, she passed him without speaking. He followed her also without a word to the door, so that she turned her head and looked back at him in some surprise. When, however, he seemed about to follow her into the flat, she examined him more closely, and then, for the first time, saw it was Lippke.

"Why, it's you!" she said in amazement. "What are

you doing here? Did you want to see me? What have you got there?" Impelled by the typically feminine surprise that in large-minded women is always but a preliminary to the acceptance of unusual situations, she stepped up to the little creature in his arms. "What child is that?" she asked, turning her large grey eyes once more upon its bearer, whilst her thoughts flew to Clara. But the old man still blinked at her in silence, with such a strangely solemn expression that she began to be doubtful. "For Heaven's sake! who sent you here? Come in! This way!" she said. "Oh my God! it is only just born!" Impelled by a sudden irresistible connection of ideas, she said, as all colour fled from her face: "Surely it is not—Felgentreu's child? Is it? Merciful Heaven! what has happened, then? For pity's sake speak, Lippke! Or have you brought any written message?"

He seemed glad that she had reminded him, and dragged Felgentreu's letter out of his coat pocket. She took it, but before opening it went into her room, where she turned on the light and settled the child on the bed. All this she did, in spite of her distress, with the greatest deliberation, as if to gain time and soften the shock of the coming blow; then she tore open the envelope, put on her spectacles, unfolded the letter and began to read. Lippke meantime, in his desire to be near other human beings, slowly slid along to the passage. When she had finished and looked up in distress, he was standing by the door staring at her. With eyes dark with fright, she looked at this messenger of misfortune, and again noticed his shabby appearance, the distracted glance in his eyes, in spite of his efforts to give the impression of self-control and dignity, and the entirely wooden solemnity in which he tried to take refuge. Fighting down the sorrow that threatened to overwhelm all other feelings, she was just thinking how she could make this man speak when he began of his own accord.

"You haven't grown any younger either lately," he remarked in a tone of some satisfaction, as he gave her a condescending nod. "The business has sucked the life out of you!" And again blinking at her he awaited her answer.

"Yes, yes," she answered, taken unawares, as she pushed her hair back from her brow. Then she remembered the child, and began with fumbling hands to remove its outer wraps. As she did so, she came across the keys, and lifted her head in fresh anxiety.

"How did you leave Felgentreu?" she inquired. "I mean, how was he? What did he say?"

Lippke stopped his blinking and made another effort to pull himself together.

"What did he say?" he answered meditatively. "Oh, he spoke of emigrating—that's no doubt why he sent you the child. For the rest, he is quite calm and quiet." The old man seemed to lose the thread of what he was saying, and in some embarrassment shifted from one foot to the other; he didn't exactly know what she wanted, and felt conscious with some misgiving of his own mental breakdown. His eyes again began to blink as he glanced round as if looking for something. "Can I sit down somewhere here, may be?" he asked. "My legs hurt me from all the running about to-day."

"You can get rest enough afterwards," she answered, once more in possession of her usual energy and clear-headedness. "But first I need your feet. Just go out of the flat, ring at the next door and ask if Frau Hawemann would please come to me."

A look of vexed disappointment passed over his face, but he obeyed. With bowed back, bent knees and elbows pushing back, as we see in men who do heavy work, he shuffled out wearily, and after a little came back with the neighbour required, a thin little Polish woman with a somewhat gloomy look about her. Meta begged her to

stay an hour with the baby, to which she agreed at once with a certain touch of reverence in her manner. Without giving any further explanation, Frau Meta requested the old man to accompany her to Felgentreu's flat. He seemed to grow a little smaller and older, but fell in with her wish now without any opposition, although there was an uneasy glimmer in the corner of his eyes and a secret unsteadiness about his limbs. Stumbling along, he tried to keep up with the long steps of his tall companion, who, as they went on their way, began to cross-examine him carefully. But he gave evasive answers or said something he had not been asked. At last he would only say "Yes" or "No," and then not speak at all. He was longing for his pipe, his lips were parched for a drink of schnapps, he was half-dead with an all-consuming desire for sleep, and his thoughts grew more and more confused. Once he heard Meta murmur to herself: "Well, well—courage, courage." A little later he said quite audibly: "There must have been reasons for it." But when she asked him what it was that must have had reasons, he shrank away and fell into a long silence.

In this way they came to Felgentreu's home, and Meta drew out the keys that Emil had sent her. When she had opened the door and looked round for Lippke, he had disappeared. She cleared her throat, looked thoughtfully straight in front of her for a moment, and entered into the house alone. In the centre courtyard all was already dark, but in the second story of a house on one side of it there was a flat with four brightly lighted windows, and if she was not mistaken that was the one rented by the Felgentreus. She said to herself that behind one of these windows the young mother lay dead, and with ever-increasing sadness she saw in her mind's eyes Emil sitting desolate by her bedside. She herself would have seen no sense in such an action. Her thoughts flew back to the tiny creature in her home, and forward with many doubts and questions

of the future, as she entered the house. With a last momentary hesitation she pressed the bell and waited.

There was not a sound from the flat. Meta thought to herself: "He has dropped asleep, overcome by grief and exhaustion," and rang a second time. When no one came then either, she cleared her throat again in her usual calm way and took out the second of the keys she had received. A minute later she was in the flat, shut the door with deliberate quietness, turned on the vestibule light, drew herself up a little, and with some reluctance, as she noticed the smell of carbolic, passed by the kitchen to the sitting-room door. There she knocked, but as here, too, all was quiet, she turned the handle and went in. The room was empty. Two gas-jets were burning like a couple of desolate souls; they flared up painfully in the draught and then relapsed into their former pale, misty light. Some mysterious movement seemed to pass through the polished furniture at the appearance of the tall, womanly figure, so like a widow in her dark garments. Meta sensed this, and felt helplessly overwhelmed by the silent desolation of this flat—the home of two lovers until to-day, and now the habitation of death. With some intuition of this, she crossed with a palpitating heart the parlour and went through the bedroom door. The first thing she saw was the pale shadow of the beautiful girl who had once been her foster-daughter and Felgentreu's idol. She stood riveted to the threshold, and gazed long and intently at her form, whilst memories of half a lifetime gradually unfolded before her troubled eyes. All that she had suffered and endured with this child, and all, too, that was beautiful and strong in the soul of the young woman who had perished here, when seen in the simple clarity lent by death, now seemed to awaken in her a new and wider understanding. Feelings stirred in her which tended to develop into all-embracing ideas beyond her power to control. At the same time she was

struggling with the sight of a breast no longer moved by mortal breath, and fell a victim to that painful delusion of the human eye that always sees movement again where none exists and tries to comfort us with the appearance of a living tremor in the cold limbs which we have known and loved. Spellbound and almost unable to breathe, she gave up the attempt to understand all that this meant in one single look, and moved again to look for her former husband. "Emil?"—her voice had a note of inquiry. "Are you there, Emil?" Only silence answered. Not even a breath did she hear, nothing but the swinging pendulum of the clock in the sitting-room, and suddenly the light, quick ticking of a watch—a man's watch, too, as she could easily tell. As if drawn by invisible hands, she now stepped nearer. The next glance showed her, lying on the ground between the bed and the little table at its side, the prostrate form of Emil Felgentreu, cut off in his manhood's strength, untroubled now by all questions of liberty or dignity, and freed by his own hand from the last problem that had proved beyond his power to solve. His yellow cheek snuggled, even in death, tenderly against the white lambskin beside Alma's bed, on which her bare feet had so often stood, as the first step to her heaven in his arms and to his in hers.

For some seconds Meta stood completely paralysed, pale and overwhelmed by the shock, for Emil was so shattered by his terrible wound that the sight was almost unbearable. The bullet had pierced his brain through his right eye, and he himself seemed to have been overcome with horror at the manner of his death, for his face was nothing but a mask of terror, pain and blood.

With a stifled cry she made a violent effort, rushed forward to him, sank down by his side and passionately grasped his shoulder. "Emil!" she screamed, as she turned his lifeless body to her, "dear Emil, what have you done, then? Is there no life left in you? Are you really

so dead and silent? Oh, my God! my God! Was no ending possible but this, Emil, my love? Were you in utter despair, and never once thought of your old Meta?" Shaken with emotion, and still not entirely realizing what had happened, she let his body slowly sink back to its former position. With her hand still resting on his shoulder, she was seized by a storm of uncontrollable sobs of deepest anguish and grief as she passed through the full flood of a wife's anguish of bereavement. For several moments the room was filled with such cries of pain as human beings only utter in perfect solitude, or perhaps in the presence of their dead, into whose ears they cannot enter. Now for the first time she felt the last tie severed between herself and this man, and knew she was solitary indeed. To realize all that this meant she would need time—much more than this sad night could give her. She got up at last, shaken to the very foundations of her being. She gave that last sad, questioning look of the survivor at the shattered face, so different in its terror from the expression of quiet death in Alma's, and then set herself to think what else must be done.

With trembling hands she took off her hat and coat, with the instinctive sense of order natural to her, and carried them both to the vestibule to hang them on the hat-stand; then she lit the gas in the kitchen, got a bowl of water and went back with it into the bedroom. But there she saw she could never do all the necessary moving of the heavy man without help, and after she had washed away the blood and covered the terrible wound, she determined to wake one of the neighbours. But for a long time, spellbound by the sight of this double blow, so terrible in its immensity, she sat there, musing sadly, thinking of the past, and in her weariness of body offering no resistance to the grief of the present. Yet again and again her mind flew back, with ever-deepening

motherly love, to the new-born babe that she had left behind in her home.

"I expect you thought you would give me something to do," she said as her great heart throbbed. "You did not fail to do that, even to the very last. But at any rate you have not left me to die of loneliness. This was your gift to me when you went away. A generous giver you always were. All those who had to do with you were honoured by you!"

The neighbours were more than ready with help and sympathy. These Berlin folk, however critical their outlook and sharp of speech they may be, show, as is natural to a much-tried people, an extraordinarily clear understanding of the terrible realities of life. And Meta's tall form, now bowed with such a heavy load of sorrow, met with as much sympathy and respect as it is possible for the natives of a great city to offer to their fellows. They helped her to undress her husband and lift him on the bed. They had, moreover, all heard the shot without knowing where it was. Some spoke suspiciously of Lippke, who had made the very worst possible impression on all who had met him. Now, too, it came out that the scene at the entrance-door had not escaped notice, but as the women were unanimous in timing the shot at 10.30 p.m., at which hour Meta had already found the old man outside her door, the earlier quarrel explained nothing, rather made it quite impossible to understand how after it had occurred Lippke could have come to her on such an errand.

"Riddle after riddle," she thought wearily. "He was always setting me riddles in his lifetime, and now goes away leaving me with one to solve."

At two o'clock the women proposed with great emphasis that Meta should rest in one of their homes, as her face showed how exhausted she was.

She, however, remembered the little creature at home

and the woman whom she had put in charge, and on their account preferred to go back to her flat now and return the following day. This the neighbours quite understood, and one of them accompanied her down the stairs, at the same time telling her all kinds of details of the two just carried off by death—they all thought she was Alma's mother—of the quiet retirement of their life, of Alma's melancholy, which everyone had noticed, of Felgentreu's friendly ways and dignified appearance, of his love of children and his readiness to help. When, however, the neighbour opened the front-door there sat old Lippke, his collar unbuttoned, fast asleep. He woke up at once, and followed Meta as though it had all been arranged beforehand.

"Why don't you go home, then, Lippke?" she inquired. "I can find my way back now quite well. Besides, haven't you work to do to-day?"

His answer was rather long in coming, and then he said, looking straight in front of him with that desolate movement of his hand that was at this time so characteristic of him: "I have no home any more. Clara has gone off—and—the others won't let me in now," he concluded in a frightened tone. Meta could hear that he was tormented by some overpowering, and possibly morbid, obsession, and refrained from further inquiries. A little later he remarked, as though pronouncing his own sentence: "There's an end of my job." He would have liked to hear how Meta had found everything up in that flat, but he did not know how to put the question, until at last he asked in a thick voice:

"Well, and what else is there?"

Meta understood his meaning.

"Not much more, Lippke!" was her sad answer. "Felgentreu has really gone away." He listened with the keenest attention for her next sentence, and rounded his shoulders a little more in anticipation. "He has shot

Felgentreu was reading the predictions of his newspaper, and prophetic circles rose up from the ground as he smoked his long pipe while the two women were busy making his new shirts. Meta shook her head in disapproval.

"If she has gone so far she can scarcely hesitate and shuffle half-way," she said very seriously. "That won't bring her any blessing. Either go through with it, trusting in God's help, or better make an end to the whole matter, which may be no credit to her."

"That's exactly what I say," he answered eagerly. "Do you see? Better make an end! For there may be something in its being no credit, Meta. Without any wish to malign the people, I must say she is certainly not going into exactly pleasant family life there. There is something wrong and degenerate about the folk. You don't know old Lippke, mother, but I've been acquainted with him for nearly twenty years. He's honest, all honour to him; has raised his son to a good position out of the very poorest circumstances—brakesman to begin with and then night-watchman at our works; he has never had much to spare. He makes short work of everything he has to deal with; the way he treats his poor little cowed wife—well, it has never been to my taste and it wouldn't be to yours either, mother. To tell the truth, at first folks say he used to beat her—until Stina submitted. It's true that didn't take very long. How do you get on with the old man, Alma?"

"Oh, middling," she answered, with a shrug of her shoulders. "He's always making an upstir. I never really know what he's at. But I won't let him rough-ride over me." For a moment she hesitated, and then went on with a half-laugh: "He has a sort of game with me when he's in a good temper; he will suddenly stoop as if to catch me by the skirts. Then if I defend myself and scream, he is delighted and grins. But if Julius is there, he won't allow

himself." The old man said nothing, but began stumbling and staggering on at such a pace that Meta had difficulty in following him; at last she let him go as he liked, and after some little time, noticing that he was alone, the old man stopped of his own accord. Not another word was exchanged between them. At the door of her house Lippke waited once more, as a matter of course, until she had turned the key and stepped—after stumbling over the threshold—in with her. He followed her like a dog across the courtyard and up the stairs, until the same performance as below took place at the door of her own flat. She felt a little of a woman's natural perplexity as to what she should do with a strange man in her masterless home, but he had planned it all quite clearly.

"Mayn't I sleep here somewhere in a corner?" he asked, with a glance round. "In the vestibule or in the kitchen?" he suggested humbly. "I can't bear it any longer." In expectation of her consent, he looked at her, and she now perceived that he was almost dropping with fatigue. So she got ready a bed for him on the sofa in the sitting-room, and found he was already undressing. Full of wonder at the fateful blows this man was called upon to endure and the changes in his conduct, she then went to her bedroom. But as she lay there so tall and silent beside this other tiny creature, that took such lusty breaths of this world's air and already so eagerly prepared for the battle which we all have to fight, and at last to lose, she forgot the old man, and very soon herself as well. With one half of her heart overflowing with the sorrow of life and the other filling anew with the inexpressibly seductive sweetness proceeding from the little unknown miracle of creation at her side, she lay motionless, listening all through the hours of this sad night, growing more and more resigned to the pain that had come into her lot and more and more prepared for a new fate. She did not exactly say to herself that the fruit, and

therefore the hope for the future, of that passionate union of lovers and worshippers of liberty had fallen back into her calm, strong hands as their executor, but the thought was plainly evident in her willingness to undertake the task with all the affection and loyalty of her great heart and all the moral strength of her Protestant sense of duty, and in her determination to bring it by God's help to a successful conclusion. Once more a responsibility had fallen to her lot, but the dearest, most beneficent that could be imagined, one that filled her heart with deep and sacred gratitude. Such feelings, when they do come at last, in their upward flight reverently touch the everlasting mountain of sorrow with one wing, whilst the valley of joy lies secure beneath the overshadowing of the other.

Alma went on her last journey to the grave with three red roses from Meta's hand upon her breast. For Emil she did nothing more after she had washed him and clothed him in his shroud; with a certain respect for accomplished facts, she regarded him as now belonging to another. Yet she gave them both a wreath that attracted general notice, and it had indeed cost a much larger sum than Meta, in earlier days, would have thought it possible to spend on such an object. Marvellous roses and lilies stood out from a background of cypress, in all their beauty and sweetness, as the expression of her grief. But on one side was fastened in more homely fashion a tiny bunch of willow catkins. What these were to express she would not own even to herself, lest all her self-control should vanish. They smiled with friendly eyes in their own quiet modesty, and spread around for those who had eyes to see something of the keen tenderness and deep love of their special season of the year. Now, indeed, it was autumn, one of those enduring autumns that cannot die, and one of those which now and again make the heroic but vain attempt to pass without a winter's frozen

sleep into a new spring full of the poetry of snowdrops and violets. Emil's coffin, on its road to the grave, grazed against the shy blossoms on the branch of a young pear-tree. Alma went to her tomb without holding converse, however short it might be, with things belonging to the world of light.

Meta was not amongst those who followed in the sad procession. She was now beginning to act a mother's part to the tiny being whom the two dead parents had left behind. Besides this, she had to see to the disposal of their home. Old Lippke, too, who never recovered from Felgentreu's last action—which meant his own final defeat—gave her extra work, since some home had to be found for him.

On the morning after that tragic night he had with but few words handed over to Meta his son's legacy; that had been one of his last lucid explanations. Then Clara gave signs of life again by writing to Meta as soon as she considered she had accomplished a successful start in her new life. The news of the changes that had taken place meantime in her social circle, and a visit to her father, whom she found utterly decrepit in mind and body alike, proved a terrible, almost dangerous, blow to her, and at first Meta had to act a mother's part to this child too. But Clara had already shown that she possessed the happy power to come out of misfortunes more or less unscathed; and of this power she now sensibly made still further use, and soon began to develop a taste for the interests and excitements natural to her years. After this Meta got fewer visits from her.

The following spring saw Clara engaged, an event that to a certain extent was the result of her flight from paternal imprisonment, her future bridegroom being the young man who had lent a hand with her basket, and who had afterwards helped her in various ways during the breaking-up of her father's home. Life always gets the

best of it, even if death will some day be the last word of all!

With a loyal remembrance of Felgentreu's craving for Nature and liberty, Meta moved that same spring to a little town in the Mark, and settled down on its outskirts to an almost rural life. There she set up quite a little colony of animals—a dog and cat as well as some feathered pensioners—and developed into a careful and skilful gardener in the cultivation of all the produce that the household needed. Whatever she touched grew and blossomed. Meantime little Felgentreu was growing into a sturdy child, and already quite sure beyond all possibility of doubt that he was the natural master of it all. Perhaps he was a little spoilt, although Frau Felgentreu was well versed—none better—in the strictest principles of a proper upbringing, but on the one hand, who does not like to please a little fatherless and motherless orphan? and on the other a little indulgence does no harm if there's good stuff in the child. Many people say all children are alike, but Frau Meta already knew better than that.

It happened just lately that for some time she had been calling in vain to little Peter in the garden to come home and have his dinner. He, however, was sitting on the green grass under a little apple-tree, still so young as to be half a bush, and having a look at the world around. The little tree was covered with blossom, so unspeakably pretty and yet with some touch of grave dignity about it, too. Moon-daisies, waving in the warm breeze above the grass, all seemed to be nodding to Peterkin, but he had already found out that they were always busy with their own affairs, and only gave their nods in passing, so to speak; if you ever wanted anything from them, no one was at home, or they looked at you in such stupid terror, as if you were a big animal coming to gobble them up. Then a ladybird came flying along and settled on the finger that Peterkin in his amazement had just drawn out

of his mouth. And it began a very active promenade, too. Its tiny dark legs gaily carried through life the protective sheath of red dotted with black, whilst the little feelers waved no less valiantly in the air; it was so desperately pretty and sweet that little Peter's heart beat fast in delight.

With flushed cheeks and eyes bright with excitement at the honour of such a visitor from the other world, he sat perfectly still, holding up his finger, and for the first time in his life felt very big and strong in comparison with the ladybird. Not that this made him in any way proud—indeed, it filled him rather with pious gratitude and a tenderness that brought the tears to his eyes. So when Meta's voice sounded from the house he still sat on motionless, without giving a single sign of life. The ladybird had come to a pause in her journey and seemed to be considering the best road to follow. Once she tripped round irresolutely in a half-circle, then ran quickly to the other side of the finger to see what was happening there. Peter, taking the most anxious care not to disturb her, turned that side of the finger round to face him, so that she came back to her old position once more, and this seemed to give her fresh food for thought. Meantime there came another call from the house. Little Peter still did not stir, but in his ever-growing passion of desire he whispered: "But I'm not going! I will not go!" The warm wind stirred his fair curls with a touch as gentle as any mother's hands; the gay world was mirrored in his blue eyes; the birds were singing, and a chaffinch that had come quite close, looking down from one of the branches of the little apple-tree first with his left eye and then with his right at the touching episode with the ladybird, suddenly burst out in his frivolous song of "Am—am—am I not a charming lover?" All the moon-daisies bowed their heads. But farther back in the garden stood an old pear-tree covered with snowy blossoms,

for all the world like a kind; good father, full of merry jokes. Little Peter felt that the future held for him many great and weighty experiences connected with this tree—experiences that would lead him to most important conclusions—but for the moment he only felt a sense of his presence and fatherly atmosphere without even looking in his direction; his attention was entirely fixed on the little ladybird. “Peterkin!” There was Meta’s call for the third time. But, quivering with the sense of life and the thirst of his soul for love, the little lad only repeated his whisper: “But I’m not going! I will not go!” That was his first look at life with a heart full of love.

A little later Meta, who had come at last to look for him, found him absorbed in rapture with the contemplative expression which his father always had when he was on the track of some very special thought. The ladybird was now performing a little gymnastic exercise on the top of his finger, but at that very moment she raised her red coat of mail, spread out the little transparent wings and flew away. Little Peter watched her in breathless suspense as long as his eyes could see her; then he turned with his father’s smile and a little questioning sigh to his guardian, got up, and putting his hand in hers, trotted obediently along the garden path. He felt very small again in comparison with his tall companion, but after the mighty experiences of the last quarter of an hour he was glad to take refuge in her strength and thankful for her protection. Besides, there was tinned kohlrabi for dinner to-day, a dish that gave him anything but pleasure. Meta, in thoughtful tenderness, insisted he should take a few mouthfuls, and then more than made up for it by giving him *pimpan*. But to tell what *pimpan* is would mean beginning another novel.

it, and then it comes to a short quarrel. Julius is not afraid of him any more."

"Humph!" said Felgentreu with some reserve. "You must excuse him a good deal. He has had a hard, rough life. And besides, you can take your time. Nobody will force you. Young Lippke seems to have some strength of character. So just let things take their course. We'll have a very pleasant family life together for some years yet, to which you can look back all your life with delight and affection. Don't worry; we will look after you with all tender care, so that you'll not want for anything, my child. You must get to know a stepfather who has washed himself with rosewater, so to speak, not to mention a mother too; you'll be better off than many a child with its own parents, for what does not come from men's hearts is but empty show."

"It's a good thing that we are both of the same mind," Meta remarked, in a tone that sounded a note of silent hostility and feminine obstinacy rather than of agreement. "And I would almost like to add: 'My girl, it does not matter in the least what step or what husband you decide to take; everything depends on *how* you take them and how you act later on.' I see many a woman happy and content because she knows how to manage her life with the husband she has taken. Even if he is like an unfertile garden with not much to offer, she knows how to cultivate it and gather fruits from the poor soil and so make the best of that little. Lay that parable to heart, Alma!"

These words of Meta's made a certain impression on her audience, for Alma looked inquiringly at Felgentreu, who fixed a searching glance on his wife.

"Well, but you certainly didn't speak like that at Easter," and Alma spoke a little uneasily; "you didn't at all approve of the business then. What has changed since? And anyway I haven't the least intention of anything serious so far."

Felgentreu, too, as he began to notice his wife, had a feeling of irritation not unmingled with uneasiness in face of her check-mate, and reverting to her last figure of speech, he said with some annoyance:

"Anyone would always rather sell the unfertile garden and get another. Why should he wear himself out because his first choice happened to be a failure? No, Meta, your moral principles are very proper, but not always very profitable."

"Let me see the people," she answered, her cheeks flushing a little as she spoke; "then we can form an idea of them and take steps accordingly."

"Taking steps is all right," he retorted eagerly. "But, my child, you can't say A without saying B as well. The young man trusts you, and there is no telling what leading of Providence there may be in that. But one thing I must just say: Under no circumstances would I allow any pressure to be brought to bear on our only child. It is our duty to protect her from taking any step that is palpably a mistake."

"Your creed is entirely wanting in stability and dignity"—and Meta's firm answer showed something very like surprise—"although you are a man of experience." And her expression was very grave as she looked him full in the face. "What has helped us on so far in our life together? There you can see it. No, no," she said, shaking her head as her memory dwelt on the past. "My mother loved her sandy, unfertile garden to the very last, and wore herself out in its cultivation. If all of us were only willing to work the good bits of land, how would the whole country be cultivated? Talking only is always easy work."

No one had anything appropriate to answer, and although for the sake of appearance they spent another half-hour together round the fire, it passed in silence—only once broken as Emil sighed: "Bah! those Turks,"

an exclamation which aroused no further inquiry. Alma was the first to get up to go to bed, for this had been the family washing-day, which always tired her a little. Frau Felgentreu, on the contrary, showed no signs of fatigue, although she had worked every bit as hard as her niece. As the girl said good-night to Felgentreu, he held her hand firmly for a moment, and in answer to her uneasy glance, he quoted, to comfort her:

"Sleep well; dream not of sorrow.
Your sun will rise when comes the morrow."

She smiled a little as the colour mounted to her cheeks, and just before she turned away a sudden light in his eyes brought to hers an answering flash, which she carried with her to her bedroom—and her dreams. All the long night through, those dreams were busy with Felgentreu, with never a thought of her dispenser, Julius Lippke. Sometimes she was escaping from a watery death, sometimes from a runaway camel. But everywhere she met his flaming hair and his bright brown eyes, heard his hearty laugh or one of his bursts of eloquence that converted threatening dangers into coming mercies. But whenever he laughed softly and rocked from side to side in that characteristic way of his, she was always alone with him in some joyous or pleasurable position—not, indeed, unmixed with anguish—which, however, she passionately enjoyed until they were torn from one another.

The next morning she was tired and pale and inclined once more to avoid Felgentreu's glances or words. Meta had never closed her eyes, for, being a light sleeper at the best of times, it needed but very little to keep her awake. Emil was talkative and noisy again, making great demands on space and time in which to give due expression to his feelings of vitality. But in the afternoon Alma asked leave of her aunt to take the invitation to coffee to the Lippkes—and returned in better spirits with the answer that all

four would come on the following Sunday. Felgentreu received the news that same evening quite calmly. Alma did not avoid his eyes, and to his own astonishment he felt utterly indifferent as to whether the young man made his appearance or not. Contrary to the two women's secret expectations, the evening passed most pleasantly and without constraint of any kind—indeed, they stayed up longer than usual. And the same atmosphere prevailed during the days that followed. Felgentreu appeared to be quite his old self again, attentive and kindly, and no longer requiring more than his usual elbow-room. He showed a friendly and fatherly interest in the approaching coffee-party, and even Meta, who was watching him most narrowly, felt once more with a sigh of relief that he had turned aside from his perilous path. Alma was the only one who did not appreciate this new peace, and felt she would have preferred more excitement in the domestic atmosphere. Once again she could not understand Felgentreu's attitude, and she thought more about him than was at all good for her, had restless nights, lost her usual appetite, and, with it, her good digestion too, as was quite evident from the pallor of her cheeks. Felgentreu thought his new daughter irritable and not very responsive, but this he attributed to excitement and hard work.

CHAPTER V

ON Saturday afternoon Alma felt it essential to give her hair a thorough shampoo. So she took off her blouse and camisole, prepared a bowl of lukewarm water, let down her hair and began operations with soap and water until with her frothy head she looked like some little rococo lady, and, when the rinsing was finished, like a smooth-headed racoon. At last, tired with her exertions and compelled

by the length of her hair to devote all her attention to it for another quarter of an hour, she seated herself on the kitchen chair with the long strands hanging down to dry before the fire. This she had purposely made especially good since the fine sunny days had been replaced by misty, wet weather, and now, with her feet braced against the lower bar of the kitchen table, she gave herself up to the contemplation of her position. Her aunt had gone out; she was quite alone, and nobody disturbed her meditation.

At first she drew a mental picture of her future bridegroom, a young man of twenty-eight, fairly tall, and not by any means a weakling, although there was something wanting in his appearance which she could not quite fathom, and which caused her not only annoyance, but silent grief as well, whenever she looked at Felgentreu and felt the influence of his manly strength and buoyancy. At the same time this disturbing something had a certain affinity with some characteristic in her own nature, and hence attracted her no less than it repelled. As a matter of fact, it was his sense of order and his perseverance, qualities which really impressed her when she was able to look at him without the presence of others; but if Felgentreu was there as well, she condemned them as petty and Philistine in character. Not that she could even then despise Julius—quite the contrary, for he made it impossible to attack or lower his dignity in any way.

Felgentreu never appeared to give a second thought to his dignity, yet always gave the impression of being a thoroughly manly man. She did not really know how Julius Lippke lived; nevertheless there was no doubt that he was a suitable and good match for her, dependent as she was on the kindness of her relatives. Moreover, as he scarcely ever went out and was accustomed to work far into the night, his yearly savings might be fairly expected to reach a considerable total. Even Felgentreu seemed to

think he had a good future before him, so she might well hope one day to see her ambition fulfilled. He had the keenest appreciation of the legacy that in all probability was coming to her from her aunt, an appreciation distinctly shown by his evident respect whenever the conversation turned in that direction. He had already more than once expressed his deep respect for Frau Felgentreu's high principles and strict views. He was, moreover, very well read and educated, and knew almost more than Felgentreu, somewhat to Alma's annoyance, since it tended to give him too much authority, but at the same time it increased the almost unwilling respect with which he inspired her. He had never had anything to do with a woman before, and it somewhat flattered her self-esteem to be the first to make any impression upon him. Sometimes, moreover, she fancied that this well-nigh colourless young man was not absolutely wanting in the matter of temperament, but she would have liked this discovery to have been more pronounced in character, for so far she could not be absolutely sure of the fact.

In Felgentreu, the most virile man of Alma's acquaintance, there was no doubt on this point at all, and she knew many other young men, more promising than Lippke in this respect, but wanting in other sterling qualities, to which with her sound judgment she could not but attach an equal value. Sometimes she thought there was nothing for it but to wait for a lover of an entirely different type, but there again just lately she had felt as if she could not afford to look out much longer. Some impulse came to urge her to come to a speedy decision.

She began in her day-dreams to fancy that if Julius, by means of a duplicate key, should surprise her now when her aunt chanced to be out, she might, in this somewhat weak and undecided mood, experience a sudden physical shock, but she owned with a sense of boredom that almost

amounted to annoyance that she would never feel in any real danger on his account. She used to run over the names of all the men she knew to find out which had the power to quicken her pulse at the thought of such a visit, but could find it in none. They were all really too—yes, too young, and this it was to which she most objected. "Who is there, then, not too young?" she would ask herself. But this was but pretence, a mere cloak to hide her real feelings, as, indeed, the whole proceeding had been. For suddenly *he* appeared as from the clouds, with his flaming hair, his bright brown eyes, with his gay laugh and that little familiar swaying movement, and his atmosphere of manliness and maturity. And he was the danger!

Once again she felt the savour of his kisses on her lips, and was overcome by that dangerous sense of approaching passion, which was so full of youth's strength and yet so powerless in its utter submission to the sudden rush of an all-conquering outburst of love, which had come so near to her on that Easter morning and before which, indeed, she was still standing. And once more her dreams gained ascendancy over her. She was alone, excited by her musing, heated, tired, idle; and, released from restraint, her thoughts strayed to their wonted path. Even the most controlled and modest nature sometimes in the dim light of dawn or oncoming night comes back from excursions into that world of natural impulse which is its real home. At last, when the noise of a key in the flat door penetrated her almost dormant consciousness, she started up in dismay and at first could scarcely realize where she was. It was already dusk, and, surrounded as she was by the unsubstantial light of the bright pots and pans in her home, everything seemed to her unspeakably strange and deceptive—indeed, even the return of her aunt, whom she had been expecting, only aroused in her a feeling of aversion that amounted to secret hostility. Suddenly, however, it seemed to her that it was not the

mistress of the house, but someone else with heavier tread and noisier movements. These were followed by a distinctly masculine clearing of the throat and the banging of an umbrella into the stand, whereas Frau Felgentreu would certainly have opened it first and put it to dry in the cupboard. Then he came towards the kitchen and began before he crossed the threshold with a good-humoured: "Well, Meta, my girl, I have got in again without being drowned." He never lost his good spirits, not even at the end of the week, which could not always be said with truth of Aunt Meta. "Have you finished your festive preparations? And you have turned to hair-washing, haven't you? Well, now," he went on in astonishment, as he saw his mistake in the prevailing twilight, "if that isn't the daughter of the house! Good evening. Isn't mother at home?"

Without any embarrassment he turned on the electricity at the door, and even when the flood of light showed him Alma with bare arms and flowing hair, he felt nothing more than the masculine pleasure that her appearance always aroused in him.

She had at last made a movement as if about to get up, but then remained seated, even if a little restlessly, and looking at him with feigned indifference, she replied somewhat brusquely:

"No; I thought you were Aunt Meta. How is it you have got back so early?"

"The boilers are cleaned to-day," he explained, as he entered the kitchen, "so we knocked off work an hour earlier. It's nice and warm here; all my clothes are sticking to me. I must say you women have a nice sheltered life. Are you going to show yourself in all your war-paint to-morrow? But not with frizzed hair—do you hear?"

"Well, of all things!" she exclaimed in a somewhat rebellious tone. "What have you got to do with my hair?"

"But listen; don't do it, really," he implored. "As your

head is, so are you. Do your hair like a shop-girl, and a shop-girl you are. A woman looks best with her hair as Nature gave it."

"I might do my hair like a lady and then I'm a lady."

"That's what you'd like, is it? To go about in silk and velvet and patent-leather shoes with bright tops. Then, indeed, you'd be a mortal danger to men—to me, at any rate. If I had the spare cash, little Alma, Heaven knows I wouldn't grudge it you. It's a pity that we put it all in the bank under my wife's name!"

"But why did you do it?" she inquired, still in indolent tones but with a certain business-like interest. "You haven't any shop—or used you to have some idea of starting one?"

"No, that wasn't the reason, my clever girl. But, you see, I was so desperately anxious to live respectably with the wife who is now your second mother—and I knew I was such a rotter that nothing would be safe in my hands—so I told her the legacy from her mother that she brought with her must remain hers and I would put it in the bank in her name. At the same time she made a will in my favour, and all that is in the bank's strong-room. She arranged that she should not have control of the key; it is in the notary's custody, and as her husband I had also to sign away any claim to it until I had reached my fiftieth birthday. Well, our savings went the same way. And when I am fifty I shall be the possessor of 40,000 marks besides the life insurance. A good match, little Alma—for the angel of death if he comes to marry me!"

"Can't you touch your savings either?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Not till mother dies—and you can understand I'm not longing for that time. You two Lippkes must arrange things in the same way. At any rate I'll make such a special proviso in my will, if I survive mother. To let another have a gay time with my wife's property,

which all my life I myself couldn't touch—I'm too jealous to do that, I tell you. Now with you, Alma—well, that would be a different matter. In nine months we should have spent every penny, don't you think?"

"Why exactly in nine months?" she asked, with a perplexed wrinkle of her brows. "And what would the money be all spent on? You want to act a father's part to me and talk like——"

He took the second kitchen chair and sat down comfortably near the door.

"But the silk dresses, little Alma!" he said, with a gentle laugh. "And the lace underclothing? What about that?"

"But such things are a necessity in well-ordered households," she said, "or one might as well live in the back-woods."

"I don't have much faith in your order. Now with mother—well, that's her nature. With you it's only policy and there's no more to be said on the matter. You are worldly and ambitious by nature, and it is only your upbringing that has taught you to live simply. In the depths of your heart you think: Anyone who can clothe me in silk and laces can take in exchange all I have to give."

"Ah, well! if you are so certain of that!"

"I'm not absolutely certain," he agreed. "And it is rather difficult to find out. How can anyone tell what is your real opinion and what nothing but expediency? To-morrow, when your suitor's here, I shall learn a good deal, shan't I, now? Now listen, Alma," he said anxiously. "I've never yet found out whether you are looking forward to to-morrow or not."

She gave no answer, and by slow degrees her provocative charm began to affect him as before.

"Now you are defying me as usual," he went on. "But, to tell the truth, it's a little too late for that. These things are easy enough to see. To-morrow evening you

will either be Lippke's promised bride or you will come into my hands. What do you say about it?"

She started almost imperceptibly and turned a little pale.

"What do you mean by coming into your hands?" she asked in a listless tone after a slight pause, staring meantime fixedly at the toes of her shoes.

"I came home quite resigned and with never a thought of ill," he explained, with simple sincerity. "My mind was free of all deceit. But, my girl, you have such a false note about your body—perhaps you are not even conscious of it, but it rouses me—rouses me terribly. You think you can take men's measure, but any man worth his salt sees at once what you are after and soon sums you up. Somewhere you must belong, either to a moral world or to an immoral. There is no middle course possible for anyone with your beauty. It tears at my heart the moment I hear that false tone of yours."

"But what a false tone you've got yourself," she answered resentfully, "so there! Besides, if you are a man of such refinement you should have gone back the moment you saw a young woman in such dress."

"That's another untruth," he said, with a grave shake of his head. "If you are pure in heart you can appear naked and never rouse an unfitting thought in any heart." He got up and drew nearer to her. "Such a beautiful, wonderful picture as God has made you, girl! Then just a touch of passion added and you will be irresistible. But you are that already!" He grasped one of her wrists, lifted it up playfully, then, taking hold of the other as well, he raised both her arms, stretched them out at full length, then with a smile pressed them together again and laid them gently down on her lap. She permitted all this most unwillingly, but said to herself that it was only the childish trick of a man "who could never be serious." He meantime, carried away by his feelings, exclaimed:

"Your skin, my girl, is purer than your heart—yet your heart is indeed a bud of magic promise; it must open now if it is not to suffocate and die within its shell—one thing or the other, lass. Don't you feel it yourself?"

"Leave me alone now," was her gloomy answer, as she shook him off. "I'll belong to no one who cannot offer me a proper position."

"You know how to challenge a man, my girl," he said, turning a little pale as he spoke. "I shall be curious to see if you can deceive yourself over the yawning gulf that goes by the name of Emil Felgentreu in your heart. I won't influence you; I love you too much for that. But to-morrow evening, if you have got over your fiasco with Julius, I will come to your door, Alma, and if you have locked it, I will kick in the panel to bring you liberty."

Alma cast a side glance at him, a little anxious to watch his emotion, but was forced to drop her eyes before his.

"Then you'll act the madman again in the hope that Aunt Meta will come to your help at the critical moment," she mocked, but nevertheless not without some inward trepidation. "Then the next day you'll buy an even longer pipe."

"Now you are hovering between hope and fear," came his smiling answer. "But I'm not going to be dared into action. When my opportunity comes, then I'll seize it."

"You want to ruin me," she said in an undertone, heavy with increasing fear and hostility.

He had taken off his coat to hang it on the door, and now he turned sharply round again in her direction.

"Now your eyes are full of tears," he said in kindly tones of brotherly affection. "Haven't I told you that I would give you an entirely free hand? At first I thought that if you became my daughter an insuperable barrier would be set up between us; that, however, proved a mistake. But as another man's property I lose you irrevocably; you can see that yourself. What do you mean, then,

by my wanting to ruin you?" And the eyes that looked so deeply into hers were full of passion. "I tell you, I could at this very instant give you the kiss that would make you mine, but that would be to do you a wrong. Act exactly as you will for the next twenty-four hours, and Heaven help us all!"

A little later, when he, too, had already begun his usual special Saturday occupations, Meta came home. She was tired, wet through and chilled, as she had had a long wait for the tram and then after all had to put up with only standing-room outside, all of which combined had not improved her temper. She had scarcely crossed the threshold before she noticed that no supper preparations had been even begun, and peremptorily asked Alma with annoyance what she could possibly have been doing all the time. Once inside the flat she saw that Emil had left marks of his wet boots on the freshly polished floors—a misfortune she could not forget at all. All this at last made Emil notice that she was a little upset physically, and when she began to shiver and look exhausted, he changed the rôle of culprit for that of good Samaritan. She refused to go to bed, but consented instead to let him tuck her up warmly on the couch. With his own hands he filled her a hot-water bottle, made a cup of tea, and when that did not have the desired result, he concocted a glass of mulled wine, which did at last diffuse some warmth through her chilled limbs. These activities quite restored his equanimity, and after he had almost worn himself out, as it seemed to Alma, with anxiety on his wife's account, he affirmed with relief that she had come back to life again, and gave her a discourse on the blessed gift of warmth, which he called the mother of soul and spirit and the electric bath from which arose the miracle of thought.

"Let yourself get cold and there's an end of all deep thinking!" he declared as if inspired. "If Goethe had had

to be cold all the time, his *Faust* would have remained unsung. There, now, she is laughing again. The home is nothing without you, dear Meta," he summed up with great decision, thereby retreating to the most distant horizon as far as Alma was concerned.

Once again he greatly annoyed and worried her, and after having for a whole half-hour felt herself in peril from him, and having made preparations with a kind of sullen confidence for defensive action, she now saw everything running like sand through her fingers. She tried to persuade herself that this time she really did see through his inconsistent and childish airs of masculine superiority, and thoroughly despised him. "As soon as he can find some more straw he'll have another fire," she thought, with an angry sense of having been tossed aside. "But very soon I'll pay him off in his own coin."

CHAPTER VI

THE visitors were fairly punctual in arriving—father, mother, son, and daughter, making a party of four in all. Meta had made two large plum-cakes. She could easily have spared herself so much work, for cakes could be bought in every baker's shop. But Frau Felgentreu would not have been Frau Felgentreu had she done that. For here there were motherly duties to be fulfilled; it was essential now to show the sort of home in which the child had been brought up. Moreover, cake-making was one of Frau Meta's ruling passions. To accompany the cake there was coffee of a superior kind, cream, and—to give the crowning touch of perfection—sugar as well; it was possible that one of the visitors might have a sweet tooth. In her own family her husband had one too.

The foremost member of the Lippke family was, as

far as size went, the son. Next came the father, who, to judge from the size of the upper part of his body, seemed originally to have been destined to attain the stature of one of the Imperial Guards. Now it was a question of doubt whether he had, with his too short legs, escaped this destiny to follow an easier calling, or whether with even greater cunning he had supplemented the shortness of his lower limbs by a long body, so that he might lead the life of a big man, with all his physical needs, without being blamed for it. Still shorter and remarkably less stout was the mother, the parent whom Julius most resembled, if, indeed, it was possible to speak of a resemblance between a human being so shadowy as to be scarcely real and another who had not yet got beyond the importance of outward show. Frau Lippke was practically indescribable, since she had no distinctive looks to speak of—indeed, an observer needed a certain amount of persistent determination to notice her at all, or to be in a position to say where she was at any given moment, what she had said during the last hour, or to assign any distinctive individuality to her—in fact, it would have been an impossible task without the assistance of sufficient imagination to invent a few characteristic features, for her whole character consisted only in an absolute *want* of character. Since she had no distinctive appearance, she only resembled such other women as had none either. We cannot even assume with any certainty that our reader is acquainted with other human beings of this kind, for it is doubtful if he has ever noticed them. If they are women, they always wear a bonnet and have a weakness for elastic-sided boots; these are, strictly speaking, their only distinguishing marks. When visiting they will never remove their bonnets, preferring rather to take off their boots in order not to mark the floor. It is, indeed, painful to them to leave traces anywhere that would show they had been there, and a bonnet kept on the head can leave no tracks

in its rear. But, on the other hand, they consume an unusually large allowance of coffee and cake, as this, too, leaves no treacherous signs behind. They dispose of their meal, however, with so detached an air and in such silent calm that all the rest of the company can notice is a hole in the cake that steadily grows larger, though no one can exactly say why. It would be quite possible to blow through them—if, indeed, the idea could ever occur to anyone that there was anything there to blow through—and a piece of paper on their back would most certainly rise and fly away. When they have gone it is never possible to state exactly either what they wore or what the aroma of their individual atmosphere was, though Frau Lippke, it is true, smelt a little of shoe-blackening. To complete the description, we must add that such creatures for all these reasons would never contradict anyone but their husbands; why these latter should possess the secret and magical power of evoking a sign of life from their usual nonentity, like a spark from an invisible flint, is included amongst the other secrets of married life, although, of course, the said husbands are the only people who ever take any notice of them, and it is also curious that such notice never seems to be of a pleasing nature.

Frau Lippke, then, belonged to this really remarkable class of human beings. Her husband was exactly the opposite at every point. He was autocratic and never failed to make his presence felt by those around him, often in a manner that was both tyrannical and terrible. Never did he happen to pass unnoticed, either from weakness or any chance absent-mindedness. He filled every second of the day with the expression of his passing moods or of his physical life; such expression, indeed, was the only thing that gave him any satisfaction whenever he was out of health or temper. It was inexpedient for his family not to put up with him, for they would then at once have had much worse to endure at his hands. It was

his hand that had kept the Felgentreu's bell so perpetually ringing when the door was not immediately answered. At its first note Frau Meta was just carrying the coffee to the stove in the sitting-room and could not set it down anywhere, whilst Alma, before her bedroom mirror, was unable to decide whether she was too-pale to-day or looked sufficiently healthy and strong to make so favourable an impression as to lead in the end to an engagement. It was Lippke, too, who first pushed through the door into the flat and took Frau Felgentreu's hand like a piece of goods that he chanced to pick up and throw away as useless.

"Well, I must say you keep people standing a good while outside your door," were his first snarling words to her. "We thought no one was in, and were just going home again."

"You surely won't make yourselves so unhappy!" Frau Felgentreu answered in shocked surprise, with a little touch of feminine scorn that suited her very well. "I have just carried some pretty good coffee into the sitting-room, and with God's help we hope to-day to give you a good meal as well."

And with this she turned to Frau Lippke.

"Of course, he ought to have let me come in first," was this lady's complaint of her husband before she noticed her hostess's hand and quickly extended her own. It felt so like a withered leaf that Meta was almost surprised that it did not crackle.

"You're in, aren't you, so what are you grumbling at?" her husband snarled from the hat-stand, where he was noisily taking off his hat and coat.

Meta, gathering in some way that Frau Lippke was looking for some expression of her opinion on the point, added a short protest as well: "Your wife is about right in that, even if it does annoy you." Then turning to Frau Lippke, she comforted her with: "But, after all, it's true

that you are in, isn't it? Alma," she went on, "come and help Frau Lippke, so that she may be quick into the parlour; she is cold."

Next she greeted the young man, who so far resembled his father that he had elbowed his sister away from the door and pushed in before her.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Frau Felgentreu," he said as she shook hands with him.

"I hope you haven't got very wet."

"I always walk on the driest side," he reassured her.

"I expect the others are fairly damp."

Frau Felgentreu seemed a little taken aback, but a moment later a slight smile flitted across her face as she answered:

"That's all right for you at present, but once you are married you will have to give up the dry side to your wife."

With this she left him, feeling a little nonplussed, and turned to his sister, a red-cheeked, plump young thing, who seemed to have inherited a good share of her father's quickness of perception without, however, putting it to the same unpleasant use. Even before Frau Felgentreu could say a word to her she exclaimed with a laugh:

"That's one for him! Such a conceited, silly young fellow he is since he got his post. Well, my lad, you'll learn all sorts of things now," she concluded, with a quick glance at Alma, who had just appeared.

Frau Meta's only answer was a little twinkle of amusement in her eyes as she inquired:

"Have you brought back the dress pattern at last? I hear something crackling in your muff."

"Good heavens!" was the girl's horrified exclamation, as she pinched her lip between her thumb and forefinger, "if I haven't completely forgotten it again! Oh, what a head I have!"

"But Frau Felgentreu certainly has a right to her own

pattern," said her brother, returning her attack and walking on soberly to the hat-stand after thus restoring his dignity. There Alma was having a struggle with Frau Lippke over her bonnet, which death itself, however painful, would never have induced the little woman to take off her head. The glances she threw at the big girl were so full of fear and hatred that no one could possibly have imagined that this was presumably the beginning of a new relationship; an unprejudiced observer, indeed, could have come to no other conclusion than that her future daughter-in-law must be trying to inflict some hidden terror upon the little woman, which at any cost she was determined to hide from all concerned. Meantime Felgentreu's flaming head made its appearance at the sitting-room door to add a welcome from the host to the new arrivals. Old Lippke had already begun to spit on the floor; he was continually chewing, and as soon as he felt bored with life he relieved his feelings by an exercise of this kind.

"Well, come at last!" was his greeting to his host. "I was beginning to think I should have to start a harem with all these women. You've been in a confounded hurry to say how d'you do to me. Standing on your dignity, eh?"

"Gently now; don't take my breath away!" Felgentreu promptly replied. "Good afternoon, old grouser! Whatever's all the fighting about, Frau Lippke and Alma? Is she trying to take your bonnet away from you? Haven't you hats enough of your own, my girl?"

"But it is much more comfortable without a bonnet," Alma tried to explain.

"I'm comfortable enough like this," moaned Frau Lippke. "And my hair's not nearly tidy enough to take off my bonnet."

"Well, then, Alma, let her alone. Everyone as he likes in our house, Frau Lippke. This is Liberty Hall, you

know," and he shook her hand, with a laugh. That done, he turned to her son, who all this time had been preparing to respond to a greeting and suitable welcome. "So this is Mr. Lippke junior!"

"Lippke!" the young man sternly interposed, as he introduced himself with a student's bow, such as he had seen in "higher circles." This consisted in throwing his body quickly forward and pulling it up again with a jerk, the whole performance giving the impression that he had suddenly lost his balance.

Felgentreu stopped a moment in amazement, and then calmly continued his greeting:

"This is a real pleasure," he declared in a tone of frank courtesy which almost disconcerted the youth. "Any friend of Alma's is always sure of a welcome from me," he went on heartily. "Please do come in." This last invitation was addressed to all the visitors. The first to accept it was Lippke, who, indeed, had already started without any bidding.

"He must always be pushing himself to the front," his wife murmured to herself, in the hope that someone might hear.

Amidst all else that went on, Alma had noticed the reception that Felgentreu gave to young Lippke; his tone had attracted her attention and made her feel excited and anxious from that moment on. Meantime Felgentreu extended his welcome to Clara—old Lippke for decided reasons of his own had studiously avoided taking any notice of Alma. The latter at last turned with some hesitation to her own special friend, who, waiting in an attitude of mingled politeness and confidence, looked at her first with some reserve, which, however, soon changed to evident warmth and incipient passion. His pale blue eyes plainly showed his masculine appreciation and admiration of her charms, and this, in conjunction with the smartly brushed-up ends of his fair moustache, lent

an optimistic touch to his pale and usually somewhat worried countenance, that was, moreover, always adorned somewhere or other by a fully developed pimple. He was wearing a morning suit of fine black cloth, the waistcoat being edged with white. His long throat was encompassed by a high starched collar of a professional cut, with slightly turned-down corners, and a ready-made tie of black silk dotted with red completed the picture of a careful, sober-minded young man, with prospects that were by no means to be despised.

The lovers shook hands, and Julius inquired how she was, to which Alma with an airy laugh replied: "Quite well, thank you. And how are you?" He was also well and had this week completed his scientific examination and was now fully qualified.

"That means hundreds in the future," he discreetly suggested.

She congratulated him, but then, as all topics of conversation seemed for the moment exhausted, they stood in silence, casting hasty furtive glances at one another, his full of excusable delight in his betrothed and future wife, and hers of secret annoyance at the pimple on his nose and the perpetual red rims round his eyelids. As every night this week he had been writing up to 2 a.m., he was looking especially worn-out and unhealthy.

Incidentally, too, they were listening to the conversation between Felgentreu and Clara, which made Alma a little jealous of such an entertaining companion and inspired young Lippke with some surprise at "the frivolous talk of a man of his age and experience."

"Well, how about the taking of Jericho?" Emil had said to the young girl, referring to some argument between them. "Were the walls blown down or not?"

"Oh! you and your walls of Jericho!" giggled Clara. "If only you can tease anyone!"

"You should read it up yourself, because you don't

believe me. Anyway, it would not do you any harm to peep now and then into the Bible."

"There's no Bible in our house," she said, with a little embarrassment. "How can I read it up?"

"What! it's barely four years since your confirmation and no Bible already? How's that?"

"How should I know? Father has locked it up. He said there are improper things in it and it's only fit for married people."

"In this case that means, then, only for married *men*," Felgentreu corrected with a laugh. "Come along, then; a good cup of coffee also tends to the edification of good Christian folk."

Clara took his proffered arm with evident pleasure as she exclaimed delightedly: "I hope I'll get such a polite husband one day!"

"Then don't spend too long looking at his double," he counselled her roguishly. "You've grown into a confoundedly pretty little creature lately, my lass."

"Oh, you're always at your jokes!" she replied, with something almost dejected in her tone.

Meantime the company were slowly moving to the sitting-room door, but on the threshold they stopped short, as if under the ban of some invisible magic. Frau Lippke had for some considerable time been refusing with all the determination of which she was capable to enter the room before her hostess. In vain did Frau Meta remind her visitor that it was her house, in which her word was law; this argument had no effect, and the little woman stood her ground as obstinately as any mule. At last all this ceremony seemed quite unnecessary to Julius, who, encouraged by Emil's example, said to his companion with a sudden rush of knightly daring:

"We had better lead the way and the others will follow. May I offer you my arm?"

With the courteous bow of invitation that he had

noticed in fine gentlemen, he waved his hand in the direction of the doorway, but as this struck Alma as being quite full enough already, she replied with a certain lack of understanding, and suddenly overcome by a contemptuous giggle:

"No, thank you—or the fire brigade would have to come with their hose, even if it didn't need a charge of gunpowder to force a passage. Do you like flying up into the air?"

"What do you mean exactly?" he questioned in surprise. And as no answer was immediately forthcoming, he added in a somewhat melancholy whisper: "Our mother is a little old-fashioned, but in other respects we must give her fullest justice. But, of course, just as you wish!"

"I don't wish anything," she answered, with an embarrassed laugh, as she became suddenly conscious that Emil was looking at her, and hastily took the young man's arm, as if to hide herself. "And, moreover, I only want my wishes always to be the same as yours," she added with no great sincerity. "But the way is clear now. Shall we go in?" She spoke with a coquettish glance, which he was more than ready to return, and then they fully understood each other.

"Yes, mother has got in now," he answered on a note of filial affection. And with eyes full of admiration for the tall girl at his side, he said approvingly: "What a pretty blouse you are wearing to-day! You made it yourself, I suppose?"

"Of course; I always do," she answered with a touch of self-satisfaction. "We never do anything else, not even with the most elaborate clothes."

"No doubt the red buttons are coral?" he inquired, as he cast stolen glances at the youthful curves of her bosom, that, defying all restraint, pressed in almost sensuous lines against the soft material of her blouse. And as he

looked, his eyes, like Jonathan's after his meal of honey, "were enlightened," whilst the pink rims round them took on a deeper shade.

"What an idea!" she laughed, with distinct satisfaction, involuntarily holding her head a little higher. "My aunt would have something to say to that. It's only the brooch that is coral."

"How well that stands out there, too," he said admiringly. An outsider might have thought his "there" referred to Alma's blouse, but young Lippke made it fairly plain that he was thinking of the virginal purity of her white throat, as revealed by the low neck of her blouse.

"Just look at the two love-birds," old Lippke remarked to the company in no very gentle tones. "See them billing and cooing! Now, Julius, is that the thing, to stare like that in public down a girl's low neck? You might wait to do that till you were left in private. Moreover, the young lady hasn't taken the trouble yet to say how do you do to her future father-in-law." All his previous tactics had plainly been leading up to some such great moment as this.

"Well, I had to help your wife first," Alma excused herself, with a somewhat uncertain laugh, as she left Julius to come to Lippke senior, who was already seated at the table. "Then all in a minute you were gone, with your eye on the cake." And she offered her hand with a "Good evening, Herr Lippke. Is that right now?"

"Right indeed!" he grumbled. "Where's your kiss? Have I got the itch? As your young man's father, I've a right anyway to a little show of affection, or how can I judge if my Julius will get what he has a right to expect."

"Oh, you and your everlasting hints!" she exclaimed in annoyance, as she pulled her hand away. She laughed again somewhat apologetically, but stopped short as she

noticed that Frau Lippke was looking fixedly straight in front of her, evidently somewhat worried, and with a little flush on her cheeks that gave her back some of her youthful charm.

"Please yourself!" the old man agreed. "Then just see that we get some coffee after all this wait." She had, however, already gone to fetch it from the stove. "But they'll make a couple a bit above the common run," he commented, as his eyes followed her with approval. "My Julius has, perhaps, a bit too little flesh on his bones, but the bride makes up for it. Tall and straight, and with a touch of spirit inside her. That was always what I aimed at, too, but then my kind heart led me to such a little darling as that," and he laughed as he looked at his wife. "One thing I can tell you, Julius"—he turned with a burst of poetic inspiration to his son—"your mother on her wedding-day was like a flower—a tiny moon-daisy in the morning dew." He cast a conjugal glance at his spare little wife, under which she seemed in some way to freeze or shrink away into utter nothingness. At any rate, she tried to escape all the curious or sympathetic glances that were turned in her direction. Then Lippke, after a close scrutiny of Alma's undoubtedly superior charms, turned to Julius again with the comforting remark:

"Well, once you are joined to Alma, fine feeder as she is, she'll manage to put enough flesh on you to be a match for her. She'll not be too easily satisfied, so you may make up your mind to that. Any time you need a bit of help..."

The steely light that flashed out from the corner of his eyes would have betrayed his thoughts if his leanings had not already been quite unmistakable. Alma turned crimson and Julius's face expressed anything but approval.

"Now, then, a little more refinement!" he suggested, without looking at him. "You seem in your rosy mood to-day." But Frau Lippke, who felt anything but pleased by the mention in one breath of her own faded charms

and Alma's "touch of spirit," remarked as a sort of veiled attack:

"Really and truly, Miss Alma ought to have introduced me. It's all such a muddle."

The words had scarcely passed her lips before she stopped short in terror lest she had said too much, and looked inquiringly at her hostess.

But her husband had made a prior claim on Frau Meta's attention.

"Well," he demanded with greedy persistence, "are we ever going to get to our coffee? All this jabber beforehand—is that the fashion in your place?"

"Suppose you let other people talk, then," Meta protested, in his own vein. "I have been wanting all the time to ask you why you didn't sit in the middle of the sofa. At your age you are too modest, surely."

"No fear of that, missus, with your cunning propriety," he muttered, somewhat rebuffed. "Where I sit myself down is always the best place, because it's most handy for the food, d'ye see? In the seats of honour I'd have to whistle for it most likely. Anyone that doesn't suit can just push me along somewhere else."

"That would mean pushing along all day and night," she smartly replied. "There wouldn't be many who didn't want to lend a hand."

"He must always thrust himself to the front," put in Frau Lippke. "He has got no right to sit there, anyhow."

As a matter of fact, his choice of seat had upset the proper order of things, but meantime Julius, following his father's example, had thought well, as far as he was concerned, to occupy the seat next to the sofa, so Meta, to avoid another move to the accompaniment of appropriate remarks on the part of old Lippke, preferred to find seats as quickly as might be for those of her guests who were still without a resting-place. She invited Frau Lippke to the chair at her side, and put Clara between the

old man and Alma, whose place was, of course, next to Julius.

"Really and truly, I ought to have been sitting next to Herr Felgentreu," Frau Lippke quietly remarked into space, as she pulled at the corners of the little shawl on her shoulders. She then drew in her chin and awaited coffee and cake, casting as she did so a scrutinizing glance at her family; at the same time she critically sniffed up the fragrance of the coffee that Alma, in her desire to get away from her prospective father-in-law, was now pouring out for each in turn. Meta cut the cake and helped her guests, giving a double portion to the old man, so that he might not think he was neglected.

At last Alma, too, sat down beside Julius, after having covered the coffee-pot with a cosy in the form of a young Dutchwoman clothed in blue. This inspired old Lippke with another joke about the coffee-pot not being the only warm and beautiful thing hidden under maidens' skirts, after which he removed his tobacco quid from his cheek to his waistcoat pocket and began to chew and sup his food and drink. People who feed noisily have, as a rule, excellent appetites, and Lippke was, in every sense of the word, an extraordinary eater. Between him and his wife in this respect there was only this one difference: that she was no match for him in variety and volume of noise, but in achievement she was practically his equal. The only marvel was where the poor thin creature could find room for all the things that vanished down her throat. She was not by nature such a greedy little animal, but had become so as the result of her jealous fear of getting less than her husband. Nor did the old man hesitate after disposing of his first plateful to help himself at once to another, and she followed his example in so shadowy a manner that it entirely escaped everyone's notice, and Meta even went so far as to urge her to greater effort when she saw she still had a little morsel left, whilst the others were sitting

behind entirely empty plates. Julius, too, gave ample proof of a fierce, unsparing appetite. With the one daily triumph of greed always before his eyes at home, he saw no reason why he should be left behind, and continually developed his stomach like the rest. Clara alone possessed the good appetite natural to youth, and inherited her father's capacity for enjoyment without abusing either.

Lippke, like most old people, had greatly limited the sphere of his activities. Either he was bored and chewed and spat, or when he was enjoying himself he also went on chewing and invariably began to tell of his journeys as brakesman. As at this moment he was enjoying himself, he began to feel ordinary human impulses and became communicative.

"Now, I can tell you," he began, "what sort of work following one's trade can be; you've not a notion of it nowadays. So you'd better hear what an old Prussian like me has got to say. On the line from Cologne to Berlin that I drove over for a good fifteen years, it was no joke, I can tell you. In summer it wasn't so bad, but in the fiery heat, and above all in winter—well, all the same, I took part in the campaign of 1870-71, and thought I had gone through something. But it was only a story out of the *Arabian Nights* compared with——"

"There are some very sad, and even horrible, stories in the *Arabian Nights*," Julius interrupted, from the heights of superior knowledge, and, turning to Alma, he added in a conversational tone, whilst his fingers were for ever busy with something in his waistcoat pocket: "He ought really to have said a fairy-tale out of the *Arabian Nights*. Fairy-tales are always pleasant."

"You can spare yourself your explanations, old school-master."

"That doesn't apply," Julius retorted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Everybody knows I'm dispenser in a good chemist's establishment."

"That's right! Don't put up with any nonsense!" was Alma's laughing encouragement. But her merriment was not quite without constraint, however, as she felt Felgentreu's eyes again fixed on her. Frau Lippke, too, glanced at her sharply, a trifle suspiciously, although only for the fraction of a second.

"Well, a fairy-tale out of the *Arabian Nights*, then, if you like," the old man said, covering his retreat with a growl. "Beginning a plot against me already. You'd do better to see he doesn't get too cracked before he's made president of the University."

"Rector," corrected Julius, in no way resenting the satire, since it confirmed his relations with the pretty girl. "You see, my excerpts bring to my notice a good many things that I shouldn't otherwise bother about," he modestly explained to Felgentreu. "I can't pass inaccuracies uncorrected; that's the natural consequence of any scientific work."

"Yes, yes, no doubt you are right," Felgentreu politely agreed. "But as regards fairy-tales. You say they are always pleasant, but I must confess that some have absolutely terrified me. Haven't you felt the same, Herr Lippke?"

"No," he owned, with an utter want of intelligent understanding. "Nothing has ever terrified me—as a matter of fact, I don't know what fear is."

"Then you are indeed fortunate," was Frau Meta's incredulous comment. "I should think you are the only one at the table that doesn't. Or are you the same?" she asked, turning to Clara.

"No, no," Clara merrily assured her. "I'm terribly afraid—I'm not made of wood."

"Nor of pasteboard either," teased Emil. "I could tell a tale or two about that."

"Oh, whatever do you know, then?"

"It is only true narrative that can inspire men with

fear," persisted Julius, "and the *Arabian Nights* are narratives—and Eastern ones at that."

"I don't know about that," said Felgentreu, pricking up his ears. "To my mind they are fairy-tales. They must be fairy-tales if they deal in magicians and marvels."

"All the same, the *Arabian Nights* are narratives," Julius persisted. "That's what they are called everywhere."

"We'll soon have that settled," said Felgentreu, who now felt master of the situation. And getting up at once, he went to the bookshelf and took down the required volume of his encyclopædia. He came back, turning the pages, and, quite contrary to his usual custom, he let Julius look over as well. "Ana—appar—aqua—aqui," he murmured, running his finger down the pages. "Ah! here it comes, ara—Arab—Arabian—*Arabian Nights*—Arabic: *Alif laila wa laila*, one of the most popular Arabian collections of narratives." He stopped short as he glanced at Julius with some embarrassment. "So narratives they are," he laughed. "Now what have you gained?"

"No, no; just read a little farther," Julius respectfully demurred. "They're called fairy-tales as well. So they're narratives *and* fairy-tales."

"Well, at any rate I'm much obliged to Mr. Julius for saving me from a humiliating defeat," Emil remarked good-humouredly as he clapped the book too and put it on the floor behind him. "I look upon that as a good beginning of our future family relationship."

"To be sure," Julius politely replied; "all one needs is to come to a good understanding," and he turned an inquiring glance in Meta's direction.

"It's quite good for him to get someone at last who will be up to his tricks a little," she said, with a sly little hit at her husband. "We haven't the time always to investigate the matter when he makes up something for us out of his old books. You must be very well-informed,

Mr. Lippke, if you read all the books you use for your excerpts."

"I don't read them all," he answered, his tone betraying the bashfulness with which she inspired him. "But one has to keep on learning; that's only right."

"Tell me, then, what have you learnt to-day, for instance?" she queried.

"To-day?" he repeated doubtfully; he no longer felt so sure of himself under the flashing light of her big grey eyes, and was thinking how he could best skate over this thin ice. "To-day I haven't learnt anything," was his slow, cautious reply.

"He doesn't work on Sundays," his mother interposed in eager excuse.

"I have been dealing with Jupiter Pluvius," he explained with an air of detachment, contradicting his mother, but with great consideration.

"And what is that, Mr. Lippke?" Meta asked. "Something to rub in?"

"No, it is a classical divinity," he replied, looking down at his moustache.

"I have never heard of him before," and Meta's tone was somewhat doubtful. "Now, don't tell me any nonsense."

But he had now determined to stand his ground with her, and retorted: "That's one of the things we learn before we leave school."

Meta was by no means ill-pleased with this new firmness of attitude. Clara began to giggle and nudged Alma, who, however, gave no response.

"There's nothing to laugh at," said Frau Felgentreu in self-vindication. "Everyone naturally wants to know a little history of the world we all spend our days in."

"Hark to that now!" exclaimed Herr Felgentreu. "You'll never listen to a word of world history from me."

She silenced her husband with a self-satisfied twinkle

in the corner of her eyes. "But Herr Julius has read the more modern books," she remarked.

"Books only give objective facts." Julius gave his verdict with strict, even if somewhat bored, impartiality as he again fingered his waistcoat pocket.

"Put that in your pipe, Felgentreu," old Lippke advised grimly. "See how you can get objective facts down your throat. Ever since he's had the smell of his chemists' drugs he's turned out-and-out objective."

"And we others are not objective, I suppose!" Frau Meta flushed a little as she put the question.

"One cannot argue, of course, about individual points of view," was Julius's considerate reply, "but wherever possible one should avoid confusion of thought. Objectivity . . ."

He broke off without stating the qualities of objectivity, and, indeed, it needed more inherent courage than Julius could boast to champion such an illusory matter under any woman's eyes so full of silent wrath as Meta's. That Frau Meta could hide her feelings with a laugh only seemed more suspicious to him, and in any case he already saw without a shadow of doubt that she was not a woman to be trusted.

"I believe you have got objectivity in your waistcoat pocket, haven't you?" she inquired merrily, "and that's why you are digging about there—or have you got something else in hiding?"

"No, no—nothing else," he stuttered, now seriously upset—"only . . . something for Miss Alma," he added, with a look that pleaded for serious discretion.

"The engagement rings," Clara said in an audible whisper to her friend. "He keeps on fiddling with them, so look out!"

"Oh, get out with you!" the big girl exclaimed in surprise that was almost anger, as she felt Emil's eyes

and Frau Lippke's quick glance turned upon her. "It's not anywhere near that yet!"

Under any other circumstances this unexpected nervousness might have caused amusement, but now no one managed to laugh at it except Clara, who took an innocent delight in the success of her joke. The discussion between Meta and her prospective son-in-law had created a general atmosphere of secret anxiety. They all felt that Frau Felgentreu had been faced in a way that was not without effect on a woman of her nature, and which she would need time to accept with equanimity. Alma's agitation seemed an evident confirmation of this, and all the Lippkes felt somewhat embarrassed, Clara even looking round anxiously to see if she had done something silly. But their hostess quickly steered her course over the troubled waters with the ease of a practised rower, and whilst Felgentreu was still weighing the matter, she remarked in motherly tones and with the kindly condescension to young folk that comes so well from riper experience:

"Yes, yes, that's what the little goose always says till the fox has caught her. But don't make any mistake, Herr Lippke junior seems to be a man who knows what he wants. Perhaps, meanwhile, you will take another piece of cake?" With this she hospitably placed a big golden wedge on his plate, although she was quite well aware that he had by no means forgotten to look after himself. "Now we'll let him have a little peace," she went on in a friendly tone. "Wasn't Herr Lippke senior going to tell us about his journeys as brakesman? Come now! Let every man have his due!"

"I've had enough of that sweet-stuff now," the old man answered. "If you've naught against it, I'll stick my pipe in my mouth for a bit." He filled his pipe, and then, puffing away with evident enjoyment at his horrible tobacco, he proceeded to set forth his views at great

length. "I was a loyal soldier and a fine young man," he began, "but when I'd been brakesman for a year all that seemed ridiculous to me already, and after two years of braking I chucked it all and turned free-thinker. What were things like? Whilst the fine folk with cash kept their coat-tails warm, such as us could career across country in fog or pitch dark, with our fists for ever on the brake cranks, for ever listening for a whistle from the engine to put them on; it was all the same at 50 degrees, or 32, or 15 below freezing—that made no difference. And no sleep for you, my good fellow. You've got to mind what you're about, serve the State, keep your eyes open for your pay of two marks, and if you made a mistake, then you'll have a fine. Got any idea what it was like? And then the D¹ trains 'ud come rushing by with their cushioned carriages so as the rich townsman may sit soft when he goes for a holiday—and nice and warm, too. Sleeping-cars and dining-cars with glasses of sparkling wine. Well, here's something for you to answer, little Frau Felgentreu: What will rich folk bother their heads about a poor beggar of a brakesman when they can afford anything and he hasn't the cash for anything? Devil take it, a dog's life. I tell you, I'll do my duty and defend my Emperor to keep up the Empire—I'm all for firm Prussian discipline for State officials and the army; I'll always stand up for Germany's fame and glory—but down with all profiteers and bloodsuckers! I demand a decent living; it's the business of the State to guarantee me that. Maybe you're thinking me a social democrat? Never a bit of it. The whole lot of them are good citizens in disguise and naught but small capitalists with savings to their name, d'you see? Pay their taxes to the last farthing, and let their sons do their military service. Mine didn't, and I pay what taxes I think right. The son of a retired brakesman gets from his father special claims on the

¹ D trains—de luxe expresses.

State, and has got no need to go to the soldiering game. A young fellow then has time to train for a decent calling and take it up before he marries. That's what I call educating your children. And what next, Frau Felgentreu? Pleasures of the flesh and love joys. Then man and wife are well off. Just ask my Stina if she has wanted for aught. Hast ever gone short, old nightingale—what? Ever lacked anything in bed or board?"

"He is always so common in his talk," his wife complained to Frau Felgentreu.

"And that's none of it the proper way to view life," Julius remarked a trifle sharply. "Not a trace of objectivity. Science is where Germany has made such an advance, but there is no sign of that in all this."

"I could tell you of some very different German advances as well," mocked the old man. "Just let war come in sight, my lad, and then you'll see if you can bide at home."

"We have got far past war by now," Julius declared.

"That's your idea, is it?" said his father, taking the pipe out of his mouth. Then, however, he bethought himself. "Oh, rubbish!" he growled. "Get on with your billing and cooing. I used to talk differently when I was at my courting."

Julius, white with rage, made no reply as he again looked down at the ends of his moustache. But instead his mother now began to show signs of life; her active fingers fidgeted about her plate, picking up every crumb; she set her bonnet to rights, cleared her throat, and showed every sign of mental disturbance without, however, attracting anyone's attention. Meantime, Felgentreu took up the cudgels for her son.

"Quite likely you did talk differently," he said in a tone of friendly mockery. "That's a matter where everyone consults his own taste."

"I maintain my personal rights in this," Julius, in

sudden excitement, explained judicially. "I am a fully qualified dispenser, and have attained a proper position in life. I decline to allow insinuations against my honour. Others must be accountable for that!"

"What! you grand fellow, with your honour!" roared the old man, with such a thump of his fist on the table as startled the whole assembly. "Deceit after deceit. Did you think, then, about insinuations against your honour or didn't you? Was it me who gave you ten drops more, or did you take them yourself so that you were all but done for? What about that?"

His son's eyelids again turned red.

"I do not need to go into that now," he answered, in a low and bitter tone. "Each one has to bear his own burden in silence. You be quiet, too."

"What are you going to bear?" Frau Lippke remarked, apparently addressing the empty air. "If anyone has misled you, let them answer for it. We are your parents. You've come here this evening for another purpose."

For a moment she fixed a look of entreaty on her son; then, after glancing with furtive anxiety at his neighbour, who avoided her eyes in much the same way, she looked inquiringly at Frau Felgentreu.

"Isn't that true?" she asked, with the expression of a desolate child hoping for approval. But Meta was still too taken aback by the revelations that had just been made in their unfeigned and anxious desire for the engagement, and Stina dropped her head sadly. "We are an honourable family with the best of reputations," she added in a whisper, and then effaced herself again.

"Well, that's how far we've got the engagement," old Lippke grimly interposed. "Misled. All right then! For nigh on thirty years I've slaved away honestly for you—never touched even a pin that belonged to others all my days. Whilst anybody else would be having a bit o' rest on his pension, I'm doing night-watchman's work

in the factory with my frozen bones. Well, old woman, you have got into your troublous years too. Hold up your head now. Give her another cup of coffee, Frau Felgentreu."

"At last you are talking sense," his hostess replied, with a real sense of relief. "She's actually sitting there with an empty cup." And, as if making a fresh start, she took the cosy from the coffee-pot and filled her cup. "You must take Alma to task," she went on kindly. "It's her duty to pour out. But perhaps we'll overlook it to-day. What do you think?"

"She wanted to take away my bonnet," Frau Lippke complained, as she carefully watched the pouring-out process.

"Never mind, Frau Lippke," Emil quickly soothed her. "Although it's a pity, too, that we didn't get a sight of your wavy hair so prettily parted. You manage to make that straighter than anyone else can."

"Yes, in this house one can feel what married love and respect is like," she answered, glancing shyly at him, but then fixing her eyes on her son, who was now making certain secret preparations with evident anxiety. She and Alma alone noticed that he produced from his waistcoat pocket two rings and quickly hid them in his hand below the table, and immediately afterwards relapsed into his former inactivity, whilst he somewhat helplessly returned his mother's look.

"Oh, come! Your husband, too, has just given you a proof of his love and respect," interposed Meta in another attempt to keep the peace. "Only let him dare to do anything else here!" she added, with a laugh. "Another slice of cake? Just a little piece?"

Frau Lippke did not answer. All her attention was fixed on the quick movement with which Julius seized Alma's hand under the table to slip on the ring, and the uneasy protest in the big girl's attitude as she allowed him to have

his will. When Frau Meta at last, struck by Stina's fixed gaze, turned her eyes in the same direction, the deed was done. To hide his excitement and confusion, Julius grasped his cup to take a sip of coffee, and all those seated round the table, with the exception of Emil, noticed a bright ring on his hand where no ring had been seen before. Deep silence followed, until Julius unfortunately choked over his coffee and burst into a violent fit of coughing. Everyone made some movement to relieve their feelings. Clara almost jumped up from her chair; old Lippke, with a wink, took his pipe out of his mouth, and Emil began to slap the young man wildly on the back. Alma alone did not move a muscle. She stared gloomily straight in front of her, not daring to lift her eyes for fear of meeting Emil's.

"That's the way," Herr Lippke remarked at length. "Dust his jacket well before you take him as son-in-law."

"Well, how's that now?" he added, turning to his wife. "Does he act like a man that's done his military training or not? So the two have settled the matter, mother. How about you two, Herr and Frau Felgentreu? What have you got to say about it? I don't see any glasses. Deuce take it, whatever did we come here for, then, in this beastly weather?"

At last Emil too noticed what had been happening. At first he was taken aback, and a sudden slight pallor, only noticeable by those who knew him well, did not escape Meta's sharp sight. But when he met her large eyes and looked into their grey depths he felt that, after all, nothing unexpected had taken place, and once more his heart, which for a second or two had made a pause that might forbode anything, resumed the steady rhythmical beat of healthy manhood.

"Look at that now, mother," he laughed, as his face began to regain its natural colour. "This is the great moment. Herr Julius has been acting whilst we were

talking and getting no nearer our goal. But first I must see my little Alma's hand as well," hiding the renewed poignancy of his feelings with a joke as he turned to the young girl, "and find out if she really has cast me off without a word in favour of another. Let me see, Alma, whether the first link of the golden chain is shining on your finger. Just help her, Clara! Ah, so it's true!" he went on, as Clara laughed and lifted Alma's hand into full view. "Really a traitor and gone over into the enemy's camp," he continued after a short pause. "Well, my congratulations, Herr Julius, my young friend. We will now drink a first glass to your own happiness and to that of the future generations to which you may contribute. I've a good liqueur, you know, which is at once strong and volatile, as all liqueurs and women ought to be. Fetch it, will you, Alma, and glasses, too. Now, how many are we? Seven," he counted. "And for your father-in-law you can put a bigger one, you know. But be quick. After cake and emotion a man must take some alcohol. But if you prefer medicine, Herr Julius, we have got some very good *Tonerde*¹ as sour as vinegar in the house."

He looked at the young man with eyes full of laughter and an expression of surprising good will, and Alma, whose troubled eyes had turned upon him, felt utterly crushed. Quite overcome, and scarcely able to move, she got up to carry out Herr Felgentreu's request, followed by her step-mother's uneasy glance. Meantime she heard her lover's somewhat sheepish laugh as he answered with a certain self-confidence: "No, thank you; of course I prefer liqueur." Once again she experienced the sense of aversion and helplessness in that vague fear with which he had inspired her by the touch of his cold, damp hands under the table and by the terrifying mixture of violence and seductive persuasion with which he had put the ring on

¹ *Tonerde*—aluminium acetic tartar lotion a specific in Switzerland for general external use.

her finger. And once more she saw with her mind's eye his red-rimmed eyelids and the big pimple on his nose, and in her disappointment she came perilously near making a scene and giving him back his ring. For an instant she clung to the sideboard, blind and deaf, and with a momentary dread of falling unconscious to the ground. But her giddiness passed, and with a movement of hopeless resentment she put liqueur bottle and glasses on the tray, not forgetting one of larger size for Lippke senior. With the sudden chatter of the company roaring in her ears like the sound of many waters, she brought it all to the table and gave a glass to each. That done, she stood for some moments with the tray in her hand, quite unable to think how she could return to her former place. Carrying the tray, she took a step or two towards the sideboard and then stopped short, lost in melancholy thought. Her ambitious heart beat feebly and slowly. She trembled with the terror of the vanquished and overcome with a foreboding of the emptiness of the fate awaiting her; her healthy nature sensed the sickly atmosphere of her future life, the strenuous insipidity of her future husband, his mother's secret greed for the "happiness" of her son, combined with the mistrust she was already harbouring and hiding with but very indifferent success under an appearance of shyness. As her lover's sheepish laugh once more caught her ear, Alma got the impression of something unclean and full of sordid lust.

His thin, narrow head, with its high, bare forehead; the contrast between his great body and the pettiness of his life, between his wolfish hunger and his affected speech—indeed, his whole make-up, as anæmic as it was bookish and plodding—filled her with such angry fear that she was no longer able to conceive how she could have let things get so far between them.

She cast another involuntary glance at Felgentreu, who, under cover of old Lippke's noise, had uncorked the

liqueur bottle and now began to pour out for his guests. "What does that mean, now?" she thought uneasily. "He is celebrating my engagement as though he was paid for it." As she listened intently, she heard him protest that this was only a preliminary to their proper engagement. The prospect of the real celebration and the memory of yesterday's talk with him in the kitchen produced such mental confusion in Alma that she felt all her strength suddenly leave her. Those sitting at the table heard, above the men's voices, the crash of some metal object, the tray, which had slipped from her grasp to the floor. She was scarcely able to grope her way to the chair by the stove, where she sank down, overcome by weakness; it was not definite faintness, but a loss of power that deprived her of the use of her limbs. With a muffled groan she hid her face in her hands; as in an unhappy dream she heard Felgentreu still arguing with old Lippke and urging all to take their glasses and drink the toast, but everything sounded faint and unreal as from a great distance, whilst a vague idea of happiness somewhere in another land floated through her mind. She scarcely even wondered at his apparent forgetfulness of her, so dead to everything did she feel. Yet she heard the tentative and hesitating notes of her suitor's voice as he said:

"But something is the matter with Fräulein Alma!" and after pausing a moment he added, in a low tone: "There she is, sitting by the stove."

"There's somebody, after all, who thinks of me," she thought wearily, and she almost felt how everyone looked in her direction except Frau Lippke, who was sitting with her back towards her, gazing fixedly straight in front of her, apparently as indifferent to her surroundings as the glasses on the sideboard. Alma was struck by the silence that followed her lover's words, and she said to herself: "Now I must really look up and smile." But she

could not do it; she was, indeed, quite incapable of the slightest movement.

At last Felgentreu remarked: "Mother, something is amiss with the lass," and his voice had an entirely different note; Alma could hear his sudden changes of feeling from one second to another. "Won't you just give an eye to her?"

"There he is once more," Alma thought, entranced by the compelling power of his strength as she waited to see what would happen. She was now quite calm and utterly benumbed. She could see in her mind how Meta listened and exchanged glances with Emil; then she heard her get up and move from the sofa.

With a flash of jealousy that even filled her with surprise she heard the low rustle of her aunt's skirts as she came towards her, and smelt almost with aversion the scent of lavender that they exhaled. But nevertheless it was with a certain filial affection that at last she felt the well-known touch of the dry, warm hand on her cold, damp forehead and heard the motherly notes of Meta's deep voice. If Emil and the others had not been there, she might have felt she had found a sure refuge, but instead of that the ring on her finger and the heavy despair of the captivity it symbolized weighed upon her like an evil charm. She was powerless to answer, and knew herself that she had again fallen into that state which used to afflict her in childhood's days when she did not get what she wanted or was especially upset by some punishment or other. Meta, too, took the same view of the case.

"Humph!" she said thoughtfully, "I thought she had grown out of that. Please bring me the green smelling-bottle, Emil. Or you do it, Herr Julius. Up there, on the chest of drawers. It is nothing serious. The spring weather upsets her."

Julius jumped up, and hurrying over with the smelling-salts, stood by in helpless terror till Meta sent him back

to his liqueur. He obeyed in great bewilderment, and fixed a long look upon his mother, as though filled with sudden doubt. But he did not succeed in catching her eye, for she persisted in her attitude of detachment, and with a sigh he, too, relapsed into the contemplation of his moustache. Clara had suddenly left her place and flitted like a bright shadow over to Alma; she knelt down on the other side of her friend as she spoke to her affectionately and stroked her cold hands, whilst Alma, under the influence of the strong scent and the hot pricking liquid—for Meta rubbed her temples as well—began to feel the returning tide of life once more. Felgentreu spoke again in quite a different tone:

"How can the spring be to blame there, mother?" he began, with a secret challenge in his voice. "After all, an engagement too may be upsetting. Have you forgotten your own escapades already?"

"Oh, don't *you* begin any now," Meta urged anxiously. "Let these things take their natural course."

"I shall not find that easy," was his candid reply. "With all due respect to Herr Julius, what did I say lately to you about unduly influencing children's decisions?"

Julius cast a terrified glance at him, but no one had any thoughts to spare for the young man just then.

"Have I interfered with her liberty?" Meta said in self-defence. "You saw the rings too, didn't you?"

"All here are full-grown men and women in the eyes of the law," he persisted. "Shall I give my opinion of the engagement now or shall I not?"

"You look upon her in the light of a daughter," she answered in mingled anger and fear. "Oh, Emil, you do not realize where you are heading!"

"To revolution, of course," he explained with growing excitement. "Do you remember that on Easter Sunday you would not for a moment entertain the idea of any engagement in three weeks?"

"Oh, Emil," she exclaimed, with her eyes big with terror, "spare us both. Let us agree, my husband!" A faint smile still bearing signs of her anxiety flashed across her features. "That, Herr Julius, was a matrimonial tornado," she said, with an encouraging nod that did but increase the young man's embarrassment. "You can profit at once by the example. Come, fetch your girl now, and take her to her place. Show your gallantry for once."

Julius again rose obediently and went up to where Alma was sitting. "Allow me," he said, as he solemnly offered his arm. Alma, still barely conscious of her actions, took it, and Julius, his face betraying the distress he did not utter, led her back to her chair.

"Now just look after her a little," Frau Meta further advised. Then she turned once more to her husband with a look of silent entreaty as she said: "Give Herr Lippke senior another liqueur, Emil, and don't forget to help yourself as well." With a frank laugh, and putting back her hair with a gesture very like Alma's, she went on to the company: "If I didn't say the moment I caught sight of the second cake: 'Now one side's too brown—let's hope it won't upset us all!' Thank Heaven it's eaten up to the last crumb. Have you still your garden arbour, Frau Lippke?" she inquired, as she resumed her seat beside her visitor. "It will by degrees grow into something like a park after so many years' care and cultivation. I expect your son often works there, too; and so you should, Herr Julius, for you sit in your room far too much."

"My heart wouldn't stand that," Julius answered, with a dubious shake of his head.

"Oh, that will come!" she consoled him in motherly fashion. And turning suddenly to old Lippke, she went on: "But I say, you old surly bear, you must have been utterly frozen sitting there in your little brake-house on the first really cold night. You will surely have had some

means of heating. We women, after all, are not so stupid as that!"

"Devil a bit of heating!" growled the old fellow, puffing at his pipe with evident signs of bad temper. "We took newspapers with us, and every quarter of an hour we set one afire and waved it round in the air—not central, but scattered heating, a patent idea."

"He has told that tale so often," Julius said a trifle bitterly to Alma, for he too had to make an effort to regain his former equanimity. "And every time I have told him the warmth was only imagination. Why, I've tried the experiment myself, and how much do you think the thermometer went up? Not a quarter of a degree even. And these brakesmen used to endanger a whole train for that."

Alma made an effort to show her interest in what he was saying, but suddenly tears of impotent anger poured down her cheeks, and Julius stopped in consternation. Fresh silence followed, broken only by the angry rattle of old Lippke's almost empty pipe. Suddenly Frau Lippke stood up.

"We must go home," she hurriedly declared, her thin hands at the same time arranging her dress and bonnet. "Come, get up, Anton," she urged her husband. "It is not good manners to stay so long—you too, Clara and Julius. Don't forget to say thank you!"

"But whatever are you thinking about, Frau Lippke!" Meta exclaimed with inexorable firmness, in spite of her decided consternation, as she took her visitor by the hand. "We are going to celebrate their engagement now."

"No, no, nothing of the kind," the little careworn woman replied, with a hasty gesture of dissent. And, smiling shyly as if to make amends for her abrupt speech, she added in an apologetic tone: "We— isn't it—well, well—oh, heavens! My son's happiness—so many thanks for everything——" Tears rose to her eyes, and there was

a suspicious twitch about the corners of her mouth. "Come, father, Julius, Clara. Good-bye, Herr Felgentreu! We appreciate the honour. Good-bye, Fräulein Alma. I hope you will soon be better——"

The almost uncanny change that had taken place in the usual retiring nature of the little woman made all present look at her with amazement, whilst her own family scarcely recognized her. Her husband gazed at her unrestrained gestures in angry stupefaction. Her cheeks were unnaturally flushed, and her eyes flashed with a fire which, as Clara involuntarily felt, boded no good for her mother. Julius stood irresolute, conscious only of being gradually overwhelmed by a wave of weary sadness that aroused in him much the same physical sensations as he had felt once before when he had had to gargle with a hydrogen mixture. But Frau Felgentreu still kept tight hold of her visitor's hand as she tried to draw her back to her seat, and the next few minutes were entirely taken up with the contest between these two.

"But there is no plot here, Frau Lippke," Meta tried to reassure her, in spite of her own discomposure. "No one is against the engagement. Emil, take your glass and make a speech that Heaven's blessing may come upon us all!"

"No, no, no!" Frau Lippke cried, as she snatched her arm away so violently that her green chiffon sleeve was torn to ribbons. "Now my sleeve is torn, too; that oughtn't to have been. We might just as well have parted friends."

Her tone seemed to express something very like a certain satisfaction in all these dreadful happenings and almost gave the impression of secret relief in her fresh insistence on a speedy departure. But then her wandering eyes lighted on her son and remained fixedly staring at him with a distress that seemed to express her surprise and inexpressible sorrow at finding him again in such trying circumstances. She immediately began an aimless

movement of her feet as she rolled her handkerchief into a ball, whilst her eyes lost all their light, like a lamp that is suddenly extinguished, and a feeling of guilt passed over her face, giving it an expression of utter helplessness.

"Emil, don't let her go like this," Meta urged in a low voice. "Do not forget that we are all mortal." She so keenly visualized the bitter disappointment that such an exit would mean for the Lippke family that for the moment she forgot all the danger it might hold for her personally. The others felt that too, but it only increased the general consternation as well as their respect for Frau Felgentreu.

"For the moment I have no feeling of mortality," Emil declared, with the calm security of radiant health. All turned at his words, and realized their perfect truth. His eyes were unusually bright, and as he got up and left his place on the sofa he seemed to have gained some inches in height. "Why look at me with such entreaty, mother? I have never given Frau Lippke anything but kind words, and it's many more she will hear from me. I have known her much longer than you have, and never torn her sleeve with my persistence. Is that true or not, dear Frau Stina? We two will be off together now to your home, let the others say what they will. As to Anton, I tell you plainly, Meta, I'm going off with him to-morrow evening to have a good drink; it's his birthday then. That's how we'll settle things. Are you frightened, little Meta?" he questioned in friendly fashion. "Surely not. You will outlive us all, you know."

He passed his hand with a caressing touch over her hair, where scarcely even one grey thread was to be seen, and gazed for a moment confidently into the depths of her troubled eyes, until the doubt they had so plainly expressed gave way to a look of candid trust. Frau Lippke looked at this conjugal scene with eyes full of restless longing, which passed, however, quite unnoticed, as all had their thoughts elsewhere. Emil's glance had strayed to Alma, who

seemed frightened at this fresh turn in affairs and shyly avoided his eyes. For a moment it seemed as if he meant to speak to her too, but then, with an instinctive feeling that her one desire now was to be left in peace, he closed his half-opened lips and, clearing his throat irresolutely, laid his hand in an access of friendliness on Julius's shoulder as he exclaimed: "Come along now; what we miss to-day is ours to-morrow." But Julius, in fresh hope, had no intention of obeying until fitting farewells had been taken. A hum of voices rose once more as old Lippke said good-bye to his hostess in a few grumpy words, expressive of anything but appreciation, to which Meta replied with hopes of meeting again before long. Felgentreu began talking to Clara, and under cover of his jokes Julius seized the opportunity to approach Alma.

"What we miss to-day is ours to-morrow," he quoted significantly. "I shall send our messenger this very evening with some spring medicine for you; it is most efficacious, and very pleasant to take." He stepped back solemnly, made another slight bow, and then turned to Meta, who repeated her hope of seeing him again soon. After a moment of indecision, Frau Lippke also went to Alma as she stood in somewhat gloomy isolation, to tell her she looked forward to another afternoon together—although she seemed exceedingly pleased to have got this one behind her—and hurried after her husband, who was taking his departure without troubling his head about Alma. Then Clara, who had been too absorbed in her chatter with Felgentreu to notice what her family were doing, gave her friend a quick impetuous kiss, made her solemnly promise to come to coffee the next day, said a grateful good-bye to Frau Meta, and was out of the door in a flash. In the entrance-hall she found Felgentreu politely helping her mother with her cloak and umbrella, an attention that Frau Lippke, in spite of some embarrassment, was accepting with grateful appreciation.

"Well, good-bye for the present, Meta, my lass," Emil called out to his wife, who stood at the open door of the parlour watching her guests' departure with a more satisfied look in her eyes—only a quarter of an hour before she had never hoped for so harmonious an exit.

"A safe journey home," she said, with a nod that included all. "Good-bye for the present." And off they tramped at last, the young people turning at the outer door, and their mother following their example, to wave again to Frau Meta.

Anton, of course, was quite oblivious of her existence. Felgentreu had given his arm to Frau Stina, as in a mood of pleasant excitement they passed along the street, close on one another's heels. Emil, quite master of the situation, at once began to hold forth on some fresh contemporary political event, thinking meantime to himself: "The storm's blown over again for to-day." He even went so far as to put a hand on Herr Lippke's shoulder and to call him comrade and future father-in-law, until the old man thawed in a surprising manner, and suddenly began in a loud dictatorial voice the recital of some important incident or other in his career as brakesman. Evidently Felgentreu's mode of address had restored his self-confidence and loosened his tongue once more.

His truculent egotism in daily life and his despotic attitude in his home were only equalled by his utter weakness in face of any moral attack, and had his wife only been a little firmer, his married life would have assumed quite another aspect. Perhaps it was the very weakness of his nature that made him unable to resist abusing his wife's want of strength.

Meantime the notes of a street organ fell upon their ears, and a little farther on they came to a merry-go-round set up on a piece of spare ground. The rain had stopped and the roundabout owner had at once taken advantage of the fine interval to pull back the curtains

round his horses and swing-boats and to wind up his organ again. A very successful move on his part, too, since people who had been kept all day indoors by the rain were now so eager to see and hear something fresh that his gay steeds proved a centre of great interest.

Even Felgentreu felt their seductive charm, and, bent on adventure, he exclaimed: "Children, what do you say to a ride in the evening light now that we are all so nicely together?"

Clara was for it at once, Julius relaxed into a solemn and indulgent smile, whilst their mother almost shrank into invisibility. The old man, seeing his own flood of eloquence brought to a sudden stop, growled in surly fashion: "Join in that stupid see-saw? Likely, isn't it? Take your game by yourself!"

But that was not Emil's idea.

"All of you who feel youth and love in your bones follow me. Come along, Stina; we'll venture as we used to in olden times!"

Her husband spat emphatically. "Stop down where you are," he peremptorily ordered. "I don't allow such nonsense!"

His words produced a little feeling of embarrassment. "But," said Clara, emboldened by Emil's presence, "supposing she would like to, what is there in it, father?"

"A cheeky young wench is in it," he answered bad-temperedly, with a side glance at her. "Mind your own business!"

She laughed somewhat nervously. "I'll do that," she declared, and looked at Felgentreu with eyes full of stealthy invitation. "I'm going for a ride, anyway!"

She stepped forward eagerly towards the roundabout, fully expecting Felgentreu to follow her, but in this she was disappointed, and stopped short with a gesture of interrogation.

"Nor you don't ride either," the old man decided, his mouth drawn down in contemptuous anger. "I've got something to say to that as well, I tell you."

It was now plain to all that the decision depended on Felgentreu, and the brother and sister looked involuntarily in his direction—Clara uneasily, Julius with objective dignity. The ensuing silence was suddenly broken by Frau Lippke's voice as she complained to the empty air: "He must always be giving orders. Can he never let anyone alone?"

Her hand still lay on Felgentreu's arm, and he fancied he could feel a quiver or some other movement betraying her secret agitation. Her sad, forsaken tones touched his heart, and before Clara could utter the defiant answer that was trembling on her lips, he said quite simply: "Now then, Anton, there's no need to be jealous. You're outvoted. Let's be off to our joy-ride!" he exclaimed, and started with Frau Stina on his arm.

With the corner of his eye he noticed how the bright colours and lights of the roundabout awoke the answering light of a craving for some pleasant excitement in the eyes of the little down-trodden woman, and she followed his lead so eagerly and with such self-abandonment that he felt an unmistakable impulse of tenderness for her crushed youth and involuntarily pressed her hand a little more closely to his side.

Clara stayed behind somewhat crestfallen, since he was no longer thinking of her at all, but she was soon more than consoled by the unwonted youthfulness in her mother's eyes as, with Emil's gallant assistance, she took her seat in one of the swing-boats—a trip on horseback seemed really too perilous for her—and started off. Felgentreu rode in knightly fashion on the prancing steed at her side, and soon began to sing to the accompaniment of the organ music; and on their second round he burst into:

"How beauteous are those youthful years,
No more they come, no more, no more;
The beauteous years that come no more!"

In a very short time he had a large audience, and Stina soon did not know where to look in her confusion and joy at having such a gay cavalier. Once she gave an excited nod to her daughter, although shyly avoiding her son's eyes, which, she felt, might not, perhaps, express quite unmixed approval. Her husband she simply overlooked—for Frau Stina too could show a little spite at times.

The one and only drawback to her enjoyment was the cold, for a fairly raw breeze had followed the rain, and she was but lightly clad. When at last she got down, she looked a little blue, but, in spite of secret shivers, she tried to hide her discomfort. Moreover, she suddenly left Felgentreu's side in the somewhat strange, brusque manner she often showed, and humbly joined her husband, whose greeting was quite unexpectedly calm.

"Well, done enough now?" he muttered, just to maintain his dignity. "I thought you were going off round the world."

She heard an uncertain, hesitating note in his voice, which always gave her preliminary warning of the onset of one of his conjugal moods, and shrank a shade more into herself until she seemed barely visible to him.

He had just seen her for the first time after many years in a fresh environment and, so to speak, as a stranger; amid all the glitter and grandeur of her coach, she had made an unexpected impression on his primitive nature. And apart from this he had to work off impulses that had been aroused in him by the secret excitement of Alma's charms and his sojourn in the affectionate atmosphere of the Felgentreu home. His jealousy of Felgentreu added a last finishing touch. He at once asserted in no unmistakable way his marital rights over her and dragged her off to his den as a sort of prey to his masculine predominance.

But she did not shake off her chill that evening. On the contrary, it seemed to spread from her body to her mind, and before the day was over Lippke had begun to rage over the mad nonsense with the merry-go-round.

But Felgentreu was no longer there. After he was so unexpectedly dismissed by the mother he had immediately turned to the daughter, whose presence he became aware of once more. "But you, poor child," he exclaimed in consternation, "didn't you get a ride as well? Think of that, now! But wait; we'll make it up to you. Now you and I will make a couple and you shall have the ride thrown in as well." Keeping an uneasy watch on the old couple in front, he gave full play to his powers of entertainment, after a time drawing Julius into the conversation as well, for the young man was quite won over by his charm, and through it all he became more and more alive to the unfathomable abyss existing between the Felgentreu and Lippke philosophy of life. Indeed, Felgentreu felt sometimes that it quite took his breath away, whilst his heart filled with pious sympathy for them all. He had never before had so strong and wholesome a sense of the great privilege he enjoyed in the comradeship of a wife like Meta as he felt this evening, when a critical afternoon had been safely passed and a practical understanding reached which relieved everyone concerned, himself included, of all anxiety for the present. Later on, as he sat alone, leisurely sipping his glass of liqueur in a spirit-shop, he indulged his philosophical bent to the full, conscious only of being a free man amongst those as free.

CHAPTER VII

PERSONAL sorrow parts human beings, but a general terror brings them more closely together. In such terror we are all in a way alike, but in sorrow each retires into

himself, with a tendency to a sense of superiority and of a right to the respect of his fellow-men. When the visitors had left the house with Felgentreu, Meta and Alma were left behind with their memories of the terror through which they had just passed. Frau Meta was, to begin with, thankful that she could find something to do. She cleared the table, washed the tea-things, and put them away, at the same time restoring some sort of order in her own soul—in fact, so absorbed was she in thought and mental activity that she never even noticed Alma's extraordinary behaviour, far less reproved it. Alma sat brooding on her chair, quite oblivious of the fact that she too had domestic duties to fulfil. Her only attempt was the exceedingly useless occupation of folding and unfolding a table napkin until her aunt, in the course of her activities, took it out of her hands to put it away with the others. But as Meta did so, her face showed its customary calm, and when she took her place at the window she did so as the mistress of the ceremonies for the evening.

"Now how would it be if you did a little more at my chair-cover?" she suggested, as she took up her own needlework. "Or is it to be given me again on my next birthday after I have sat about for another year on this old thing?"

Even Alma saw the force of this reasoning and got up to fetch the work from her bedroom. It was a cross-stitch pattern worked in wools, of red roses, pansies and festoons, destined for Meta's work-chair, and the source of many ironical remarks from that lady, to whom it had already been presented as a finished article!

"Do try to finish that marvel," she now exhorted Alma. "I am beginning to feel ashamed of this old threadbare wolf. It looks as if I did nothing but sit at the window. Now listen: if you get it done by the first of next month you shall have a half-holiday and plenty of pocket-money to have another outing with Clara. Not that she

deserves it from you. How are we to begin your dress without a pattern to cut it out by?"

"Frau Kallmorgen will lend us her pattern, I expect," Alma answered with a little sigh, though why this prospect should make her so sad was not very clear.

"That's a fine way to manage," Meta retorted scornfully—"to lend our own patterns to all and sundry and go begging for other people's! What's the use, then, of subscribing to the paper?"

But this problem was beyond Alma's power to solve, so meantime Meta began to plan her campaign of cutting out the new garment. She remembered the pattern so exactly that she could quite well have cut out the new dress without its aid. She had already even decided on the alterations which would be desirable in her opinion. As a whole it seemed too fashionable and elaborate, and her alterations were in the direction of greater simplicity and severity of line. For some time she alone held the field, for Alma said neither yea nor nay to any of her proposals, but by degrees Meta began exaggerating a little in her desire to rouse her adopted daughter and bring her out of herself, until Alma at length broke into a half-uneasy, half-amused peal of laughter.

"But, Aunt Meta," she admonished the speaker, "the dress is not meant for you! I think we had better stick to the pattern."

"Pattern indeed! As if you had a pattern! And supposing you had! Do you want to run about like a live fashion-plate?"

"I shall have to run about like something else, I suppose," Alma replied, relapsing into her former gloom. "I want to look like other girls."

"Well, you'll have a good fight before you do that, I warn you," Meta retorted. "This year I consider it better you shouldn't look like the others."

"So you thought last year and the year before as

"Yes, when the fashions are enough to turn one giddy to look at you."

"You have never complained of giddiness so far, although you have looked at me often enough."

"Because, my girl, I preserve you from the very latest extremes."

"Well, flowered satin isn't the latest this year, and that is the material for this pattern."

"Oh, is it? Then we'll have to fix on another pattern, after all. Or how would it do in good cotton?"

"With to-day's narrow patterns satin will cost no more than a good cotton used to in the days of full frocks."

"And when full styles come in again we shall still keep to satin," objected Meta. "No, you young folks," she exclaimed, "how clever you get! And so you want to have a narrow frock?"

"I can't go about in a full one if everyone wears them tight-fitting."

"Oh, you needn't trouble about that, my child, if a tight dress is really not to your liking."

Alma hesitated for a moment, and then with a laugh confessed:

"But it is to my liking."

Meta glanced at her.

"Perhaps your Julius has expressed himself in favour of it too?" she inquired.

"Oh, Julius!" Alma said with a frown. "He speaks against them, but looks on the sly at every girl that wears a tight dress—and his old father just the same. I expect that's the men's way," she went on, and stooped lower over her work.

"Many say so," Meta replied with some amusement. Then she went on more seriously: "I'll tell you something, Alma. I've learnt a good deal from Felgentreu—do you the same with your Julius. Yes, people talked a good deal at that time because at five-and-thirty I was

marrying a man younger than myself, but I knew very well what I was doing. It was a risk on both sides—well, we took it, putting our trust in God. Now we have been living together for ten years and kept faith with each other in all that life has brought us. Well, you see how we manage, often very happily and often failing, too—that's life, of course. Have you thought of your Julius in this light, I wonder?"

"I—I—don't know. Perhaps," Alma replied in a sudden access of shyness. "You see, I scarcely know anything about him yet." With a feeling of something like solemnity she realized how this strong, self-possessed woman lived and moved in her husband, and she began instinctively to think by what means she could gain her future husband's esteem and fill her place too at his side, even if not quite in the same way. Marriage for her meant, to begin with, a simple indulgence of the bodily senses and then only a question of capable management, for the man in his business and for the woman in her housekeeping, so that they could make their way in the world. But even in this she felt something worth while might be accomplished. There was something sobering in this ideal, however—something that filled her with an ill-defined distaste and effectually damped any enthusiasm she might otherwise have felt. Meantime Meta continued.

"Of course, you don't know enough about him yet," she asserted, whilst she fixed an interrogative, almost inquisitorial, look on Alma, and her needlework dropped from her hands. "But one thing is quite plain: he absolutely worships you. There is a good deal repressed in the young man that you could bring out. He is industrious and persevering, sober and home-loving, too. Well, in some things they are all a little strange. The reason why I have never talked about your future before was because I did not know the people. Now I should like to tell you that if you will make up your mind and be true to your

word, I will see you have a trousseau that you need not be ashamed of. And the two of you shall have a little gift so that you do not need to begin quite so economically; but that's not for you personally. After Felgentreu, you both shall be my heirs, and when young Lippke is ready for a chemist's shop I dare say that can be managed too. There, now you know what I think and what I mean to do. I have only the one condition to make: that you do not betray my confidence in you. And God bless you, my child."

It was a relief to Meta to have spoken her mind in this way; her eyes grew bright and happy, and her maternal gravity changed to the encouraging sympathy of a loving mother. Beginning with the dress that they were about to make, she passed on to the trousseau itself, telling Alma all she had had herself, and listening at the same time to her adopted daughter's personal desires. These were expressed at first with timid hesitation, for Alma found it difficult to conquer the impression made upon her by her aunt's grave words and the realization of the emotion that so evidently lay behind them.

It was only by slow degrees that she grew a little less restrained; at last, however, they were both deep in a confidential talk about the necessary household linen and the cut and trimming of her own garments, the kitchen necessities, furniture and curtains—in fact, never before had Alma found her so-called mother so unreserved and sympathetic, so that every now and again the young girl's heart overflowed in unfeigned reverence and the old childlike affection. At last Meta began talking of her own engagement and of the incident that she and Felgentreu both called "the first look of mutual love."

"My father was an independent Berlin master-potter," she explained, not without pardonable pride. "At that time there were still a few left of the old hand-potters; now they are practically all gone. He made stoves—you

know those great fine stoves with niches and figures. As a rule he made all the designs himself, and everyone said that no more elegant stoves than his could be found anywhere. But his favourite work was table china—indeed, he had really a perfect passion for it, and it was by this he made his wide reputation. No one else had such beautiful milk-jugs and coffee-pots as his. His cups, too, were fine—well, we have plenty on our shelves still, for fortunately you've not yet smashed them all to pieces.

"But as time went on, more and more factory stuff was used. This saddened his later years a little, but except for that he was a good and happy man. I sold in his shop from the time I was fifteen years old to thirty-five, and I must tell I always preferred to sell the things that he held so dear. Those who belong to other parts have no idea how deep the affection of a true Berlin native can be. They only hear his particular accent and think that's all that distinguishes him. Well, and my esteem for the people who came to buy varied according to whether they chose his hand-made pottery or asked for factory rubbish. Well, now, one day in came a young fellow of about thirty, very fair, with curly hair and a little untidy French moustache. His lips were red with pretty boyish curves, and he had the brown eyes of a Southerner, always ready to give a friendly smile. Straight away he explains that in a fit of temper he has broken some of his landlady's china and wants to buy other things for her. In a minute his eyes that are looking round and taking in everything catch sight of father's old-fashioned pottery, and he smiles all over his face. 'Bless my soul, Fräulein!' he breaks out in his Berlin German, 'what's that confoundedly pretty stuff you've got over there? It's ages since I have seen its like, but my mother had a whole kitchen full of it. Hand me some down, Fräulein, and as quick as you can, for I can scarcely wait to get it in my hand. That fat, stumpy little milk-jug over there, with

its reliable-looking spout. Come along, my dreamy Gusta!

"He would speak like that even to perfect strangers. I was quite unaccustomed to strong language, and no doubt a little taken aback at first; but when I saw how eagerly he took the milk-jug out of my hand and began stroking it, I forgave him everything. He would be the husband for a real woman, I think to myself, if she could keep him in order. But she would have to keep him on a lead, not to get any more of his china breaking! Well, even whilst he is still busy looking at the blue jug and stroking it, he asks for another, a brown one, and so eagerly, I tell you, that I could not help thinking that he must have a large heart. He handles the brown jug just as lovingly as the blue, and then he's all for giving a big order. But I know what women are, and so I ask him if the things he had broken were that kind. He looks at me in surprise, and then says: 'No, it was that modern stuff; but the old woman was so furious over the breakage that I thought I would give her something special.' He laughs again and I laugh too, but say: 'I'd have been furious too. But you had better go over first and ask if she would like the old-fashioned things—or else you'll have your trouble for nothing, and will possibly break these pots as well!' Then he looks at me more carefully. 'Well, well,' he says; 'perhaps—— But look here, who can help having a giddy fit? Then the stuff gets broken, and a good riddance too. Well, I'll go and ask the old girl—just to get the chance of coming back!'

"There you have him true to life. And you can imagine his look. I turn red, of course, and say with a laugh: 'That's right; do so. And folks must once have had a fancy for stupid, worthless pottery, or they wouldn't have bought it.' I had got into the habit at that time of making wise remarks. 'But, confound it all, why on earth do they buy it?' he bursts out again. 'There is no sense

in it!' He turns on me with a furious look. I flush up again and stammer out: 'Perhaps—because there isn't enough hand-made to supply the big demand.' And I think to myself: 'What a stupid you are all at once, and talking like a book too.'

"Evidently he thought the same. 'It's all nonsense about the big demand,' he says quite sadly. 'In the Middle Ages there was a big demand too, but they didn't make any rubbish. But there were no capitalists then who made most of the population into poor vulgar folk. Well, well, old Prussia has to pay the penalty of it!' Then I noticed he was a social democrat, a thing I'd been taught to consider as bad as bad could be. He upset all my ideas, and before very long I saw there was something quite reasonable about it, and that his thoughts were not those of any special party but of a man who looks all round things.

"Well, this time he finished by going off to ask his landlady. Of course she wanted modern things. So the next day he came back laughing with the answer. 'So you have a good knowledge of human nature!' he exclaimed. 'I ought to have someone like that belonging to me to keep me from stupid mistakes. Since my mother's death I've knocked about in the world, so that very often I am sorry for myself!' And he seemed so worried and looked with such anxious inquiry into my eyes that my heart beat twice as fast. 'I tell you, Meta lass,' he said to me later on, 'at that moment I felt for the first time almost as if I had come home again.'

"That was our first look of mutual love, and it never brought a flush to my cheek. I didn't flinch under it either, although it nearly took my breath away, what with feeling how small and stupid I was and grieving for his homeless state. But then again it was impossible to understand his wholehearted laugh in spite of it all. Well, I got time afterwards to study him, but at first we set ourselves to pick out modern cups and jugs for his landlady. And for

himself he bought a whole stock of the old-fashioned pottery. 'I'll never eat another bite from that other horrible stuff!' he said—with a laugh, it is true, but with a serious look in his eyes as well. And that vow he has never broken."

When the clock pointed to half-past eleven Frau Meta made Alma put away her work and go to bed, for she thought the young face still showed signs of past emotion and need of rest. Alma protested in vain, and, moreover, had to swallow a certain powder always kept in reserve for such occasions, after which Frau Meta saw to it that no time was wasted in reading or lengthy toilet operations. When her adopted daughter was safely in bed she left her with a good-night kiss on her brow, and Alma for long after heard her moving in the sitting-room as quietly as any mouse.

When at last these sounds too subsided into utter silence, Alma's thoughts began to busy themselves with the memory of what Meta had said. Her words had fallen like seed on the young girl's heart and brain—some, indeed, lay still asleep, but those that pleased her fancy or touched her own life most nearly grew and grew, sending out many promising buds and blossoms. As a matter of fact, Alma, in spite of all, still felt somewhat upset with her twenty years and the first beginnings of her engagement. "Lover or no lover!" she thought sadly. "Suppose I keep his affections and he does not keep mine? I'm not a woman of such character as Aunt Meta." But then she began to consider the advantages of this new relationship: a good trousseau, the future chemist's shop, the envy of her friends, the prospective inheritance, all things intimately connected with Julius Lippke. "All the same," she thought to herself, "Aunt Meta has some secret motive for her promises, or why should I have to marry this dispenser and nobody else at such a break-neck speed?"

Suddenly she remembered Felgentreu's announcement as to what would happen if she were not in safe hands by this evening. At first, in the cool light of her unawakened girlhood, it all seemed a mere tale, but by degrees this feeling of unreality gave place to a secret fearful curiosity and a certain feeling of inner weakness until, after continued and deliberate reflection, she no longer felt by any means so sure of herself. The door was unbolted, and even if this had not been one of her aunt's rules, it would have remained so, for Alma was not a girl to make a public parade of her innocence.

After she had wavered for a time between defiance and a secret longing for adventure, she got up, and as she was walking to the door she suddenly saw in the bright moonlight flooding her room a mental vision of his fair head and brown eyes. He gave her a look of playful mockery as he shook with laughter, so that her suspicions seemed to her mere foolish prudery. This made her forget her original intention, and, filled with secret depression, she turned her steps to the moonlit window. There she seated herself almost angrily in the moonlight that was falling in a long triangular beam of brightness on the curtains and across the room. Like some wild creature of the night or a great white bird, she cowered with melancholy discontent in the cold, almost glaring light, and thought almost sadly how she would maintain her principles in opposition to her friend and uncle should he prove so presumptuous and so deeply in love. She was, in fact, so angry that in her exalted state of mind she had now not the slightest feeling of insecurity. As she thus awaited him, his key at last rattled in the lock and the door of the flat opened; but now, filled as she was with a kind of morose joy, her chief fear was lest he should pass her door and rob her of that maidenly triumph which, as a rule, is but the preliminary to a male victory, for young girls, full of fancies as they are, can

afterwards rarely do enough to compensate the vanquished wooer for his defeat. Now, too, her heart began to race along, and she was just about to hurry to the door and bolt it; but a strange fatalistic feeling of paralysis seemed to overwhelm her, and she continued to sit motionless awaiting the course of events.

Then Felgentreu's umbrella was put in the stand, and complete silence followed for a few moments. Alma longed to sob aloud, but was powerless to utter a single sound. Then she began to feel cold and could not remember one syllable of the eloquence she had prepared to greet him. Next the little passage-lamp was evidently put out; a moment afterwards her uncle pressed down the handle of the sitting-room door, and a little later she heard him in the bedroom saying in his usual voice of quiet affection: "Good evening, mother. Still awake? You surely haven't been waiting for me?"

Shivering with cold, Alma crept back into bed and drew the blanket over her ears to shut out the sound of her uncle's and aunt's voices. In a second her eyes closed. The strain of waiting had so wearied her that she lay for several hours in a sleep of utter exhaustion. It was not until early morning that she woke with the dull throbbing pain that warned her of the onset of a sick headache, which was the usual effect of such an attack as Alma, in spite of her otherwise strong constitution, had had on the preceding day. The throbbing temples warned her, too, that she would have to spend the day in bed, and thus would be absolved from her complimentary visit to the Lippkes; in spite of her pain, Alma felt only pleasure in the prospect of this respite. With greater patience than usual she resigned herself to suffering; half an hour later everything was alike to her, and she was conscious of nothing but her aching head. The pain was at its worst all morning, eased about noon, leaving as its legacy the misery peculiar to nervous headache, when

the sufferer's thoughts seem like screws in the brain as they twist and turn and never get on any farther. At four o'clock, however, she took some coffee, which seemed a good sign even to her. Towards evening she felt distinctly easier, her mind cleared, and the events of daily life began to regain their significance.

Her first real idea was that once again she had been right in taking Felgentreu seriously, and, moreover, that this matter had altogether passed beyond the region of play. Last night's happening had left her with no feeling of relief. Her relationship to Felgentreu filled her with dark foreboding, although he had spared her yesterday—or, perhaps, all the more because he had.

Felgentreu himself she did not see before late evening, when she made her appearance at supper. She was pale, but that only made her more attractive to such a man as Felgentreu. She fixed a sad and penetrating glance upon him, as though weary of strife, and gave only low evasive answers to his inquiries after her health. Her silence meant nothing but "You crept past my door yesterday without a word," and as such he fully understood it.

Felgentreu gave no sign of discomposure, but his brown eyes flashed with joy and his face, with its high white brow, for a moment betrayed a feeling of greater confidence.

"Doesn't she look this evening like a Mary Magdalene?" he asked his wife, with a smile. "Don't be afraid, Alma lass, you shan't be given away for too low a price; too many eyes are watching over you for that—ours and the good God's make six altogether."

A little later, as he came out of his room ready dressed to go to the "birthday swill" with old Lippke and found Alma sitting by herself in the parlour, he passed his hand with a sympathetic touch over her hair, advised her to go to bed again at once, and wished her good-night. His last word, however, was again for Meta. "Don't

mope this evening, wife," he said in friendly tones as he stood outside the door. "Take a little glass yourself so that you keep in touch with me and I can think of that as you drink it."

CHAPTER VIII

FELGENTREU took Lippke to his favourite bodega in the Friedrichstadt, where they provided the Spanish wines of which he was particularly fond and all kinds of special dishes "concocted" by the innkeeper's art at a cheap rate for the benefit of his customers. The bodegas attract a special clientele, entirely different from that frequenting beer-houses or even other wine-shops. They are, so to speak, more democratic as regards the varying classes to be found there, but aristocratic in comparison with the beer-taverns, where customers of all ranks are boon companions over their glasses. Felgentreu, as a true Berliner, frequented these too, but there were few Sundays that he did not round off with a last visit to his special bodega.

At first Lippke's conversation consisted of circumstantial accounts of the splendour of his brakesman experiences, giving prominence to an engine-driver of his acquaintance, a gigantic, extraordinary fellow, according to Lippke, who was never satisfied with things as they were, but drove his goods trains across country like the very devil and had fixed up a special whistle with as deep and penetrating a note as a ship's siren. Felgentreu saw the old man was anxious to shine in the reflected glory of this renowned engine-driver, who had been a friend of his, and also that his comrade's romantic independence made up, to a certain extent, for the deadly monotony of his own official career and for the entire lack of anything but prosaic sameness in his own life that aimed at nothing

beyond material pleasures and achievements. The material pleasures he had achieved, but not his other aims, since he had never climbed higher than a brakesman's box. Others had become either station-masters or something of the sort, with subordinates on whom to vent their ill-temper, whilst for such essential relief he had at his disposal only his own family circle in general, and more particularly his wife. But when Felgentreu grew weary of this subject he himself turned the conversation on to the subject of women in general.

"Now look here," he began, looking lovingly at his glass of wine. "To have such a wife is, so to speak, like having a small handbook. If there is anything puzzling you in daily life you take your living handbook and consult it. Turn to 'character,' 'love' or 'loyalty,' and then you will find a full explanation at either number 3, 8 or 16. Yes, and all your doubts vanish. Of course, no woman is really clever, but such things form part of their natural make-up, and they are simply magnificent in them when they are good sort of women—well, you know that yourself, no doubt."

"I don't know anything of the sort," Lippke growled, with no little irritation. "I've always found one stupider than t'other. I'd rather be rid of the whole lot. Whatever they may look like, they are all the same underneath."

"Then you've just had bad luck!" was Felgentreu's pitying remark. "It is only when you go below the surface that the real revelation comes. I expect you always gave up too soon. In my wife I always find ocean depths; do what I will, the sea has no boundaries—except the church. Do you go to church often?"

Lippke growled something that sounded like an affirmative, whilst he enveloped himself in a huge cloud of smoke. "That is, if I haven't had any night-work on Saturdays," he went on in his grumbling way.

"Yes, yes," and Emil nodded thoughtfully. "I can't

make up my mind to go. But if I try to make her disloyal to her Maker . . . See here, it was to be a repetition of our first wedding-night, and perhaps that should have the first place. But why? Women can be persuaded by facts."

"By an iron fist, you mean," growled old Lippke. "The brake-strap and . . ." he made a significant gesture. "Your woman has too much to say in the house for my taste; you give her too free a hand. Not just one night, but every night I'd have taken if it had been me."

"Then there wouldn't have been much left of her!" Felgentreu retorted somewhat uncomfortably. "Will you take another glass, or shall we try another tippie—port wine, eh?"

"Right you are," Lippke assented with alacrity; "I don't often get the chance of being treated in such a fine fashion. You know what's what, Emil, and that's a fact."

The old man was accustomed to nothing but beer and spirits, so the fiery wine soon began to affect him. At first he tried to hide it by deliberately posing as a fine strong fellow and a thoroughgoing tyrant and trying to ward off the alcohol onslaughts by the aid of his strong tobacco. But the novelty of this new drink only made its effect more speedy and more certain. To begin with, indeed, he remembered that he was to a certain extent dependent on this benefactor, and that his son's prospects were bound up with his father's good behaviour; after all, it was certainly a good match, for even if one didn't exactly know what these people had, he was quite convinced that there was something substantial to their credit.

But by slow degrees he began to kick against having to show deference to a much younger man; he was annoyed that he could achieve nothing by coarse and shameless speech, and was conscious of a certain helplessness that both angered and embittered him. Meantime, Felgentreu turned his conversation on to Alma, mentioning that she had been ill all day, but would certainly be better by

that's how he would take her, too, and I might ask you as well, if you would allow it. Possibly that might be a ticklish question for you."

"A fine sort of question!" Lippke scoffed rudely. "What use has my Julius got for a guttersnipe that gets attacks, if she has no money prospects? A wench like that must have money, or she'd better be put away for life with her aristocratic nerves."

"She is no guttersnipe, I would have you know," Emil slowly replied, with a warning flash in his eyes. "Only vulgarity upsets her. But there, however much a man tries to hide it, his real character comes out at last. It comes upon many a one suddenly, and then out bursts the truth."

"The truth!" the old man angrily exclaimed. "First you tempt a man and then catch him with your fine speeches. But you'll not always be able to do your crowing. One day you'll get cancer of the stomach, or some such thing, and then see if you can cure it with your ready jaw. But there, that's only my talk." He pulled himself up with an awkward wave of his hand. "We're honest folk, Emil, even if we are poor. You only need to know my Julius—a fine, honourable fellow, with every right to think well of himself. No doubt about that. You might do a good deal for the lad—such a well-educated man as you."

"I don't know about doing anything for him!" objected Emil in a gloomy tone, for he was beginning to feel old Lippke was more than he could bear.

"No, no, don't say that!" and the exclamation was almost a threat. "In all the factory there is only one opinion: Felgentreu is a perfect gentleman! Ah well, one has to have good luck. But common folk like me just have to slave away till they burst. What's left for such as us but food, drinks and women—and a bit of money as well? But I've never had none; every farthing I've spent on my family. I always thought my boy should have it

better than me. I tell you that's why I am grateful to you for taking him up. Spoken to your wife about it, have you? What's she going to give straight away for the wedding? I want to know for Julius—I'm his father, anyway."

Emil pushed away his glass uneasily; the wine had ceased to give him any pleasure. "A complete trousseau and 10,000 marks," he answered at random, "and, as far as I'm concerned, the rest after my wife's death."

The old man cast a stealthy, suspicious glance at his host as he puffed out great clouds of smoke. "Humph! And how much is what'll be left when your wife dies?" he inquired with a self-distrust that he tried to hide, as he made a great effort to listen attentively in spite of his state of muddled intoxication.

"The trousseau is to come out of our common savings. Then mother adds 5,000 marks of her own to make up the 10,000 ready money. What's left comes to about 30,000 marks."

"That's worth talking about," commented the old man with unnatural self-restraint and another icy flash in the corners of his eyes. "Then I'm glad for Julius. But about your giving it all up in your lifetime?" he went on in his inquisition. "You'll have to live. Perhaps you've got something else hidden away, eh?"

"I can work, can't I?" Emil answered, shrugging his shoulders. "What do I want to hide anything away for?"

The old man thought to himself: "He'll have an insurance for when he's sixty!" and suddenly became quite gay. "Of course," he loudly agreed, "you didn't marry your wife for her money, and all of it won't keep her for you, so devil take the worthless stuff. Let it help the young fellow to get on! You're always one to look at things the right way."

On he went with his commendation, whilst Emil paid and prepared to go. With a grand flourish of his pipe and

a somewhat unsteady gait old Lippke left the bodega in the company of his future brother-in-law. No sooner was he outside than his spirits rose to such a pitch that he began to sing aloud, "Oh, Susanna, Susanna, how lovely is life!" following it up with "In a shady glade," but quite without warning he suddenly fell into deep depression about his wife.

"When I think of it, Emil," he said, stopping short and looking thoughtfully down the street, "a wife's got a poor life of it. What games one has with her! How I've kept mine down and tormented her! Look here, the next wineshop we pass you'll buy a bottle of red wine for me to take home to her. I'll pay you back the cash; just now I haven't got it in my pocket. She's been all to-day in bed, shivering and chattering her teeth. 'Round-about' fever," he added, with a sidelong glance at Emil. "She's got out of the way of such polite attentions." Then in a burst of confidence he went on: "We've always had a special game between us; she's got such a nice throat—you'll have seen it, just such a proper handful that makes your fingers itch to be at it. Well, when I was in the mood, you know, half-love and half-rage, just as anyone gets with the women, I'd begin my game with her. Soon she knew when it was coming and got terrified at once. And then came the question, Will you end by—well, well, you know what I mean—or will you squeeze her throat for five minutes or so? After a while I always began to choose the throat-squeezing. And if you'll believe me, she, too, got to like it best too. Once she owned to me what she felt about it. 'O German Rhine, thou flowest free,' " he roared. "'Our joy and pride shalt ever be!' Shut your mouth, brakesman!" he ordered himself. "You're naught but an underling, out of the proletariat—just a low blackguard, Anton Lippke. And you're another, my lad," he said to Emil, and came to a sudden standstill. "Shall I tell you why? Ah! ah! no

doubt you thought you were a fine fellow. Just let me catch hold of your little throat! I'm so fond of you, dear Emil, you traitor——"

"Drop that!" Emil said calmly as he pushed his hand aside. "I have no fancy for such games with my throat. You can just tell me why I'm a blackguard and then get home to bed. How do you mean I'm a traitor, Anton?"

"A blackguard—a traitor!" Lippke's spiteful babble went on as he critically looked Emil up and down. "Why, because you have had tricks with Alma and want to wriggle out of the consequences by getting rid of her to Julius with your 20,000 marks. But never mind! We are real—realists. Where there's anything to get we take it and don't make many bones about it, us Lippkes, father and son. But we're no fools neither. The girl's come to grief, and Julius is to put her on her feet again. A fine fellow you are. My compliments to you!" He gave an excited twitch at his cap. "Just give me—shall we say?—1,000 marks hush-money. You'll have to do something to keep Julius off the scent. You can depend on my keeping my mouth shut, friend Emil."

"Don't go too far," Felgentreu murmured, half-sick with aversion and annoyance. "You can have your 1,000 marks—what do they matter?—on one condition: that they are married within a month. Is it a bargain?"

Lippke stared him full in the face with eyes full of hatred. Emil was pale, and his countenance showed a depression that might well have put the old man on his guard had not his brain been too muddled to heed any warning.

"All right, then!" he muttered distrustfully. "It gives me a chance to earn a bit." He was silent for a moment, then burst out confidently into "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*," snatched his cap off his head and waved it in the air. "Can you guess what I'll do with the 1,000 marks?" he exclaimed. "I'll pick up my little beaten old

woman and take her for a honeymoon again. 'Come, little Carolina—come, to Rixdorf now we'll take our way, amid its beauty there to stay.' But perhaps I'll add some little shop-girl to the party—one with black hair or fair, or maybe, too, a fiery brown. Ugh! yes, yes, my son Julius, how you're being trapped, and by such nice fine folk. Let me feel you now, young Emil! Don't make a fuss; I can't swallow that. You don't suppose, do you, that we'll forget this dirty trick of yours? You've wounded our honour and smirched our family. Away with your hand! I'm drunk now—I've got a good drop of liquor in me! So I can only warn everyone not to rouse me!"

His "good drop," indeed, made him scarcely able to stand on his feet; it was only his hatred of Felgentreu that kept him from falling. He caught hold of the far taller and stronger man with obtrusive familiarity and began to take great liberties with his person, firmly holding his coat, pulling down his tie and seizing his beard, to all of which Felgentreu at first submitted with but little resistance, for fear of hurting the old man. He did his best to prevent Lippke from stumbling past him and knocking his head against a wall or falling headlong, whilst he adjured him in friendly fashion: "Now be sensible, Lippke; mind what you are about, man."

But suddenly the drunken man found strength to spring upon him and grasp his throat. Emil tried in vain to shake him off; his fingers tightened their passionate grip, and his mad rage found vent in a first chuckle of satisfaction. Everything swam before Felgentreu's eyes and he breathed with difficulty; his heart beat fast, and there gradually crept over him a dull, sad understanding of the old creature whose unsteady, furious eyes he could see flashing below his own. He knew that this uncontrolled and twitching face, this grinning mouth with the smoke-discoloured teeth, expressed an outburst of the hatred of an overlooked and insulted man, and that for

the first time in his life an abyss of mortal peril yawned before his own feet. This attack meant more than the depressing marriage business, and as he said this to himself he felt overpowered by deep grief for the fate of this ill-starred man, whose anxiety for his son and mad desire to avenge himself for all the humiliations of his own life had found vent in an attack upon him personally. Now whether it was this frank understanding, combined as it was with boundless sympathy, that in some strange fashion made itself apparent in Felgentreu's manner or not, at any rate Lippke suddenly loosed his hold and stumbled back. With starting eyes and fumbling fingers he made a confused attempt to catch his cap that was slipping off his head, missed it, and stooping down, with a strange mournful sigh, fell forwards on his hands and remained some time lying in this position. All at once Felgentreu, who was standing by sunk in thought, thought he heard him sob; nor was he wrong in his surmise.

Then the old man began to talk confusedly of all kinds of irrelevant matters, and Felgentreu saw plainly that he was now completely overcome by his recent drinking bout, so he did him one more service: pulled him up, took hold of one of his arms and of the back of his coat with his other hand, and literally dragged him all the way home. Lippke shed many more tears, interrupting them from time to time by patriotic songs, asseverations of his honesty and patriotism, and frantic efforts to go to his work as night-watchman.

It was in this condition that Felgentreu restored the head of the Lippke house to the bosom of his family. The old man was now quite stupid and knew no one. Clara received him at the door with a somewhat terrified face and a look of silent reproach at Emil, but then she bravely lent a hand and helped to get him into the living-room, where he found a first resting-place on the sofa. Stina immediately inquired from her bedroom what was wrong,

and Clara went to give her report. A momentary silence followed, and then Felgentreu heard her say in rather weary accents, but with a certain hesitating satisfaction in her tone: "That is quite all right; he has enjoyed himself. Give my thanks to Herr Felgentreu, and you and Julius bring your father to bed." Even the unsophisticated girl must have been struck by something in the sound of her mother's words, for her look at Emil had changed to one of eager inquiry as she came back and delivered her message. He, too, saw clearly that he had done a kindness to the poor woman to-day after the misery she had endured the day before on his account.

"Tell your mother that will last now most likely for another six months," was his equivocal answer. "If there is any need for repetition, I am always at her service!" Meantime Julius had also made his appearance, coming from his scientific work with ink-stained fingers. With his help the young people removed such of their father's garments as were essential to get him to bed, Julius with incredible clumsiness, but Clara so effectively that she again impressed Felgentreu most favourably. Julius afterwards accompanied him downstairs with evident signs of distress on his father's account and of vexation at the interruption of his studies.

But when Felgentreu had already said good-bye and turned to go, the young man followed him and called him back again.

"Just one word more, Herr Felgentreu," he said hastily, but making a manful effort to overcome his shyness. "I mean, I do not wish——" His eyes were full of respect whilst he tried to smile politely. "I should so like to know—how I stand objectively." His mental perturbation was plainly evident in the way his hands ceaselessly fumbled with his garments. "I mean—about Fräulein Alma. Can I still hope, do you think, Herr Felgentreu?"

Emil, attentively studying this shamefaced outburst of

a taciturn, almost embittered nature, felt his mental depression grow still heavier.

"If you have not only sincere affection but real strong faith as well, Herr Lippke!" he answered very seriously at last. "In that case, indeed, you may hope everything." He experienced a fresh mental impulse as he added with an encouraging nod: "I shall keep my eyes open for proofs of your faith."

Then at last he started for home, but for some time he kept a mental vision of the distress in the young man's wide-opened eyes and pale lips and the understanding in the sudden droop of his head. The firm respect Julius still felt had not escaped Emil's notice, and a sympathy that was almost torture filled his heart for the young lover, although—in spite of the sense of his ever-increasing weight of responsibility—he could see no possible way of helping him. "And how is any help possible there?" he thought gloomily. "What a man acquires by his own innermost power, that alone belongs to him. The power must grow in him. Where I feel no power, I go on like any other force of nature, doing so, too, without any real strength of will or character. If I have an environment of real faith and strength of mind, I am an honourable man, but if I meet with doubt, indecision, temptations—I am at once depressed and change my outlook. Now the two Lippkes are much more useful kind of men; whether the atmosphere is good or not, they stick to their own point of view and never change."

Thus meditating, he came to his own door, opened it, stepped in, and, closing it behind him, crossed the passage and courtyard and mounted the three flights of stairs at the back of the building. Still entirely preoccupied with himself and his meditations on his character, he entered his flat. He was just going to turn from the landing into the sitting-room, through which he had to pass to reach their bedroom, when his attention was called, he knew

not how, to the open kitchen door. The half-light from the window seemed to stand up like an apparition, facing him with the inquiry, "And what of the girl?" In the background he noticed Alma's door; the tick of her alarm-clock sounded to him like the regular beat of her heart; his own at once quickened its pace in response, and a sudden spirit of adventure sent the hot blood coursing through his veins. After the dreary emptiness of the evening and the disorderly confusion of the night, her very existence was an earnest of something sure, of something so reliable from a material point of view that it might restore his lost self-respect. His imagination showed him her beautiful life following its natural course and set free from all artificial restraint under the mysterious veil of night.

His new access of primitive strength yearned for a struggle and fresh experiences with some force of the same nature; almost unconsciously he found himself on his way to the door, and quite by chance he remembered the agreement. The engagement had not been settled, and the girl had therefore "fallen" to him. He had scarcely a doubt in his mind as he laid his hand on the latch, yet when he felt the door move and open before him he experienced a feeling of sudden warmth. His first glance showed him her bed bathed in moonlight; as so often happens at this season of the year in Berlin, the wet day had cleared up towards evening and been followed by a clear and unseasonably cold night. The girl lay asleep in the full starlight; she was lying on her back, her head bent a little to one side and one arm half under her forehead. A shade of strange thoughtfulness—almost of sadness, indeed—lay on her face, but at the same time her lips were parted as if in desire, and seemed to smile. The whole picture was a revelation to him, especially as the moonbeams, with that joy in disclosure which they share with every form of light, unveiled more of her charms.

But a moment later she suddenly started up. Had a board creaked, or was it the sense of his presence? With a quick movement she sat up in bed and stared at him with horror in her great eyes, still full of her sleeping dreams. With a mechanical movement she put back her hair from her brow, and it seemed as if she would scream but could not. The light showed him the conscious fear, all uncontrolled by day thoughts, that was written across her features, now somewhat sharper than a short time since.

"How did you get in here?" she asked in great confusion, and the beating of her heart was distinctly audible between her low-toned words. "I locked the door, I am sure."

Felgentreu frankly observed her sincere distress with an instinctive feeling of respect. "Think of that now," he thought, almost as if gratified. "She never dreamt of being on the watch." His voice was kindly as he answered with the ease that was so natural to him at awkward moments: "At any rate the door was open and your scent floated through to me. Besides, we had an agreement that you won't have forgotten. Does that seem so bad to you? I can, of course, go away again. But whose are you now? That's what we must have no doubt about!"

She still stared at him as at an unwanted intruder.

"No, no!" she exclaimed at last, without knowing what she was saying, as she again put her hair back from her face. Then with a low groan she fell back on her pillow, and after a pause of disconcerted silence and indecision she repeated in a tone of absolute dejection: "But I certainly did lock the door."

She was shaking with cold and excitement, and Felgentreu could hear the chattering of her strong white teeth. As he saw her girlish strength turned into trembling fear his somewhat morbid thirst for adventure gradually began to give place to pity and a generous sympathy with her.

"Well, then, the lock is out of order, I expect," he answered after a moment's silence. "You haven't used it

for so long, and we must have it seen to. But that's all one," he went on. "I won't force you, my girl. I told Julius to-day that if he could show an honest faith he would win. You are honestly afraid, and that, too, is a powerful weapon." And he continued to study her look of helplessness and the lips which terror kept so tightly closed. The moonbeams were reflected in his eyes; his hair shone in the silvery light. "Now listen," he said with a serious nod. "I'll give you all this coming week. Frau Lippke is ill through my fault, so you'll have a quite natural excuse if your heart leads you over there; they'll be delighted to see you, and you will take sunshine into their home. On Sunday morning we can see what next. If then you are at the Lippkes—good; but if here—good too, for whatever happens I love you. I can give you no other alternative, my girl. Now go back to your dreams and I'll pray Heaven to send two angels to guard your slumber."

The deep emotion in his voice as he uttered these last words all but melted Alma's heart and filled her with longing again, but before she could realize what impression had been made upon her, he and his flaming head were gone and the door shut behind him. She was left alone, and although his presence had filled her with passionate fear, she could not but feel that she had paid a heavy price for her present solitude. The moonlight seemed no longer filled with sad beauty, but cold and unreal instead. She fixed her eyes on the door in sad dissatisfaction, as though it had been a source of loss to her. She crept under the bedclothes again, for, in addition to her vexation, she was tormented by a nervous fear of hearing the murmur of her aunt and uncle's voices from their bedroom, and listened anxiously with an anticipatory sensation of jealousy. But to her surprise to-day there was complete silence. With returning warmth, her heart gradually revived, and in a little time it was full

of dreams once more. So long as the dreams came from her heart, her head had no say in the matter—indeed, at any time it only made its prudent calculations by day, when, wearing a pretty dress like any proper young girl of Berlin, she walked through the streets, as a “young lady” seeing her friends, gazing at shop-windows, and surrounded by the general babble about careers, getting on in life, money and good matches. In bed she “lived,” for she was a creature of the night.

Meantime, however, Emil found that creature of the day, which his wife undoubtedly was, so wrapped in sleep that she barely awoke at the sound of his footsteps, perceived his presence with blinking, drowsy eyes, and turned over with a sigh to drop into unconsciousness again and to allow herself after this short interruption to float away once more on the soft-flowing waters of sleep.

Emil, however, felt surprised to find her so overcome, and involuntarily began to seek for a cause. Then he remembered having seen a glass on the dining-room table, and that was explanation enough. Totally unaccustomed as Meta was to alcohol in any form, a single glassful was quite enough to produce such an effect on her, and Emil was deeply touched with this evident proof of her obedience to his request thus to keep in touch with him during his absence. When he got into bed, she stretched out her hand, as was her wont, to give him a loving touch, and with those dear fingers—so soon asleep once more—grasped in his, her husband spent long wakeful hours in thought and anxious consideration of the future that lay before him.

CHAPTER IX

FRAU LIPKE had high fever; she lay silently on her pillows with shining eyes and a bright red spot on either cheek. In the weary hands, moving so restlessly over the

counterpane, she grasped a small handkerchief, which, however, she never used. Her pulse was weak but very fast, and in the opinion of the doctor she was possibly developing inflammation of the lungs. For the moment, may be, only the right side was threatened, but after the life she had led her heart was prematurely worn out, and the doctor considered her condition grave in any case, and his injunctions were very strict. Clara was nursing her with devotion and a passionate understanding of a sick woman's needs; she kept a jealous watch that none but her own hands should serve her mother, and developed an independence of which she had shown no signs before, even daring to oppose her old father whenever she considered it essential.

For example, she thought it much more useful if, instead of ceaselessly walking up and down the bedroom, the old man should shop instead of her, and to his daughter's astonishment he took the marketing-bag and went off. She would not allow any smoking in the bedroom, and he yielded. Then she began to object to his wandering about there; if he needs must walk up and down, he was to do so in the parlour, and when he came into the sick-room he must sit still. He heard these regulations in silence, and continued his wandering in the worst of tempers. Suddenly, however, he went into the parlour, banging the door behind him, and marched round the table there for fully an hour. When Clara next passed through the air was so heavy with tobacco-smoke that she could have cut it with a knife, a legacy he had left as a sign of his wrath, for he had meantime been sitting for half an hour in dead silence in the bedroom on a chair in the corner by the wardrobe. There he sat brooding for the rest of the day, until Clara called him to supper, after which he had to go off to his night-work again. When he was not absorbed in his meditations he watched the invalid with a fixed stare of his little grey eyes under

their half-shut lids, an elbow on each knee, and his hands idly folded, whilst his teeth were busy chewing his tobacco quid. These observation periods greatly worried and excited his sick wife. She had never been at ease under her husband's attentive gaze, and had always felt most comfortable when he took no notice of her at all. But he imagined that his present fixed stare was his undoubted duty as a good husband, although to his wife it seemed to say: "Make haste and get better, I tell you. What goings-on are these? And whatever did you begin for? Just be quick and get done with it!"

When Lippke had wakened on the Tuesday morning from his drunken sleep he was anything but pleased to find, instead of his former obedient slave, a wife who was really ill. His first impulse was to begin brawling, but the sick woman met his furious glances with such evident terror, and the warning in Clara's reproachful eyes was so emphatic, that he stopped short and got off the bed in high dudgeon. He vented his wrath in angry abuse of Felgentreu, whom he held entirely responsible for this misfortune. But as he began to recover from his drunken carouse of the day before he made an effort to regain his usual stern and threatening manner, which he considered best adapted to keep his family in check. But, as we have seen, it had no effect at all on Clara, and Julius never even noticed it, for he cut his father during the next few days, as he considered his behaviour on the Monday evening was nothing short of a scandal and most "compromising"; the young man made a special point of speaking about his sick mother to Clara only. He had dark circles round his eyes, looked pale and nervous, and had lost his appetite. Whenever the two men chanced to meet in the parlour they walked up and down on different sides of the table, or one went into the sick-room and the other stayed behind.

His son's contempt, of course, did not escape the old

man's notice, and it was a sore point with him too that he was no longer able simply to ignore the younger man's mental and moral superiority. It moreover annoyed and angered him that Julius most sternly declined to enter into any conversation concerning the Sunday coffee-party and its probable results. It is true that he showed the same unwillingness with the other members of the family, but not the same contempt—indeed, he went so far with his mother as to listen patiently, although he declined to respond in any way, until at last she gave up the attempt in despair.

But, in spite of this, no one thought of anything else. From Tuesday on, Frau Meta had considerably sent a messenger with the news of Alma's indisposition on the Monday. They all began to await her visit. The moment the bell rang, old Lippke ran to the room door to listen, and if anyone entered the sick-room the invalid eagerly scanned the new comer, then dropped her eyes in disappointment, or, in the case of her children, looking at them with eyes full of apologetic inquiry. When Julius sat down to dinner he did not directly question his sister, only followed his query as to the doctor's visit with another as to fresh happenings in general; but Clara understood him, and he knew she understood. The first day passed in anxious silence. In spite of all they had to occupy thoughts and activities, evening brought with it a general sense of emptiness and disappointment. There was a touch of bitterness in the atmosphere round the supper-table, to which old Lippke further contributed more than a touch of disagreeable irritation. He was by no means inclined to go to his night-work to-day, when he felt he ought instead to go to bed, to sleep off the remnant of yesterday evening's fatigue as well as the fresh weariness caused by the exertions of the present day. At last he went off in a mood of angry annoyance. When his sick wife heard the front-door shut behind him, she gave a sigh

of relief for the first time that day, and, utterly worn out, sank into the unrefreshing slumber of high fever.

At the factory Felgentreu was waiting for the old man to hear how his wife was. Lippke mumbled his report and avoided meeting Emil's candid eyes. He began his night's watch with a sudden oppressive sense of moral inferiority for which he could not account in any way. He had now, too, reached the stage of "feeling himself a new man," and the grey-headed old fellow who, until now, had been so proud of himself and his mean ways was conscious of a feeling of helplessness, a need of advice which he could find no way of satisfying. His work demanded the greatest exactitude on his part. There were clocks everywhere that he had to set at a fixed moment, and this clever bureaucratic machinery permitted no independent action on his part nor left a single loophole of escape. But what made his present position worse was the fact that he was suddenly deprived of his domestic outlet, his private safety-valve, so to speak, and that even in his own home he could no longer be free of all restraint and act entirely as his whims dictated. He began a restless search for some possibility of "recreation," but in every direction he was pulled up by these new and mysterious inner scruples. He was by turns despondent and furious, felt dull and ill at ease, and passed the night in a most unsatisfactory state of mind.

Meanwhile Felgentreu, prompted by a sudden inspiration, had on his way home entered a general grocery store and ordered a basketful of all kinds of things for the invalid: a bottle of port wine, one of vermouth, another of cognac, some oranges, fresh and preserved figs, dates and anything else he could see, choosing something from nearly all the shelves and drawers as if he could not get enough, and in his zeal buying more than he could pay for, so that he had to leave his gold watch—Meta's wedding-present to him—as security. He had all his

purchases sent to the sick woman's home, but refused to say his name, and gave strict orders that the messenger was not to describe his appearance. He took back a mark from the money he had already paid as a tip for the man to ensure his obedience; and this precaution had the desired effect as far as the door of the Lippke's flat, but when Clara, who in her astonishment at once thought of Felgentreu, gave the grinning lout another half-mark as well, he complacently explained that the sender was a tall, brown-eyed man with very fair hair and beard. Clara ran at once in high delight to the sick-room to show the basket to her mother, whose eyes, too, testified to her pleasure and relief. Even Julius—whom Clara dragged out of his mental laboratory just as he was, collarless and in a threadbare house-jacket—had a gay, hopeful smile round his serious mouth and brushed-up moustache; he returned to his inky den with his stained fingers and the conviction that all would now be well, and after a vigorous use of his handkerchief he sat down with fresh inspiration to some fresh compilation.

The Lippkes were, moreover, all agreed—each, however, keeping his opinion to himself—that Alma had been prevented by special circumstances from coming that day, but she would certainly appear on the following.

And this conviction remained unshaken almost to the moment of the final locking-up the next evening; it was shared even by Lippke, after he had critically examined the presentation basket with half-closed eyes, and restrained him from further insulting remarks about the giver, and even the somewhat acid remark: "It's easy giving when the pocket's full! We seem to be getting splendid relations!" was apparently only an expression of his pleasure. At last the idea struck him that Alma wanted to wait until he was certain to be out of the house, to avoid being annoyed by him, and as he also was anxious not to meet Felgentreu again, he started off a full half-

hour before his usual time. Julius, in defiance of all rules of strict economy, kept on his collar when he came home a little later, and showed a little more care in his handling of the ink. The expectation had given the mother a really good day. Clara refused to believe that her illness was in any way serious, and said she would be up again in two days' time at the latest. But the later the hour, the more quickly did the apparent improvement disappear, almost as though the whole day's loss of strength had to be compressed into the space of two hours, and in the evening her temperature had risen to 104° . But her eyes still retained their look of eager expectation, and not until her two children had with keen disappointment closed the outer door after ten o'clock did she sink into utter exhaustion.

Thursday was a brilliant spring day, and Frau Lippke heard the blackbirds singing before it was light; one was perched somewhere in the yard, pouring forth a flood of song that resounded from every wall. This, combined with the silence of dawn and the first faint gleams of light, filled her with strange, mysterious feelings. Her weary heart began to make itself felt after the bad night and early waking. For a long time she wondered if she was going to die, a prospect that filled her with terror, although life had had so little to give her. But now even its sadness seemed sweet, and she felt a strong desire that it might go on for many years. After seven o'clock the old man came home; he looked weather-beaten and unslept, and sat down to stare at his sick wife whilst waiting for his coffee. Shortly before breakfast Julius also made his appearance; he had slept badly too, and was pale and quiet; besides, he had got up earlier to work off his restlessness in scientific studies, with which he had been busy for the last two hours. Whilst they were drinking their coffee a small bird flew into the bedroom and somewhat upset Frau Lippke. It settled on a corner of the wardrobe,

flew against the wall, caught its claws on the edge of the curtains, but on the whole behaved quite sensibly and found its own way out again. It was followed by two butterflies, who fluttered in, one after another, and pursued their love-making for some time round and about the room. The doctor brought a breath of spring in his clothes and in his buttonhole a little bunch of violets that he handed to his patient; he gave her every hope, and even to Clara outside said nothing to make them anxious. In short, the day passed just as a real heaven-sent spring day should pass. An airship flew over the house in the brilliant sunshine, followed by a whole flood of fervent wishes. An organ-grinder had crept unseen through the entrance to the courtyard, where he was playing an air from the latest operetta, and, in consideration of the beautiful weather, the house-porter refrained from sending him off. Frau Lippke enjoyed the music, that brought calm and comfort to her soul, with the promise that she should once again walk amongst her fellows. Felgentreu's present was standing still untouched on the table, the basket with its glistening crimson bottles, golden oranges, resplendent blue and purple tickets and a cheap green ribbon winding in and out like a streak of Bengal fire. Whenever her mother liked to listen Clara read to her from a very beautiful romance called *The Heart's Magic*. But in spite of all these favourable portents and promises no visitor appeared.

In the afternoon old Lippke struck a discordant note amidst the domestic harmony. He began to grumble at Felgentreu's gifts, abusing "such behaviour" as lordly condescension, and above all casting doubt on the quality of the wine as well as showing temper because the bottles had not been opened.

"Sitting all round like poor folk that daren't begin," he growled. "Looking with holy reverence at the rubbish as though it had been sent by the Crown Prince. You

should drink the stuff to give you a bit of strength, mother, but first I'll try it all, to see if it'll do you any harm—first-class liquor it is sure not to be."

"You can't expect that either," Clara quickly objected. "First-class is what rich folk buy. Don't spoil it all for us."

"Open the bottles, do," said the wife in her weak voice, but with full knowledge of her husband's character. "Just try them. Who knows? perhaps I might afterwards feel like a little glass myself. The doctor said I might have it." She stopped to cough, looked at her daughter in timid uncertainty, and then turned on her side to escape for a time from the tormenting stare of her husband's eyes.

Lippke got up in high dudgeon from his chair in response to Clara's glance of displeasure.

"I can't even stir in my own home now. I won't have such play-acting in my house," he burst out suddenly. "If wine is needed, I can provide it myself. You don't need to turn up your eyes in gratitude to the noble Fritz, with his contemptible rubbish. All your job is to get better!" And with that out he went. The two women heard him tramping round the table as the hours passed, and the smell of his tobacco came through every crack in the door. Frau Lippke cried quietly for a little, and then asked Clara to go on with the reading.

Alma did not come that day either, but the next, about noon, Felgentreu suddenly made his appearance in the flat. Lippke had avoided him for the two last evenings, and since Emil and his wife were both anxious he had come to hear and, if possible, to see for himself. His appearance made a great sensation. "Just as if a prince had done you the honour of a visit," old Lippke thought grimly enough. Although he knew Emil's voice very well he did not stir from his seat by the stove, and even when Clara, all smiles, brought their visitor into the sick-room the old man looked past him in cold indifference, and

barely offered his hand, without making any attempt to get up. But a flush mounted at once to his wife's thin and somewhat sunken cheeks, and her eyes shone with joy. The way in which she offered him her hand at once expressed quick pleasure and fear of her husband, who was noticing everything with the corner of his eye, to the great embarrassment of the poor woman. Her first articulate speech was an expression of thanks for the beautiful basket she had received.

"What basket?" Felgentreu asked in surprise. "I know nothing about any basket. That one? Come now, don't frighten me! How should I have thought of such a thing? You must run over your admirers in your mind, Frau Lippke!" She shook her head as her eyes flashed with pleasure, and Clara was on the point of contradicting him, but Felgentreu continued without a pause: "But why haven't you opened the bottles yet? Clara, give your sick mother a little glassful at once. Not that, but the port wine. Here, I'll open it myself; I have got a corkscrew in my knife."

"Well, you're a fine one!" Clara giggled. "Such a deceiver as you——"

"Anton ought really to have written our thanks—or Clara," the invalid remarked in an undertone interrupted by a cough. "How came you not to think of it, Clara?"

"Then, indeed, you would have put me in a fix," said Felgentreu, busying himself with the cork. "And then possibly the joke of making Anton thank me for what he had sent himself——"

"The lad said it was a tall, brown-eyed man with fair hair and beard," cried Clara, quite beside herself with enthusiasm.

"There are a few other tall men with fair hair in Germany," murmured Felgentreu as he put the bottle on the ground between his feet and pulled very cautiously so as not to spill the wine.

"But brown eyes as well!" Clara persisted, never noticing how her father spat once more; he soon wearied of such conversation.

"Come, Clara, we'll drop this now," Felgentreu remarked in very friendly fashion, in spite of being a little tired of the discussion. "You'd better go and fetch a glass, or is your mother to put the bottle to her mouth?"

"Whatever next!" Clara exclaimed as she clapped her hand over her mouth. Then off she ran, and reappeared rubbing up the glass as she came. "What a stupid I am!" But her lament did not hide her delight. "Here you are, Herr Felgentreu."

But now the old man began to show signs of life.

"And you haven't brought a glass for your father, I suppose," he grumbled. "Didn't I say I'd taste everything before it possibly upsets your mother? Who knows where the stuff comes from or what sort of wash it may be?"

The women looked at him in horror, and Clara's eyes flashed in anger, but before she could speak Felgentreu turned to look at the quarrelsome old fellow as he said: "Well, it doesn't smell quite so bad as all that, I think, but it's just as well to try it yourself." And he handed him the glass, but the old man only spat again in reply to his effort at conciliation.

"I don't take any first sips," he said shortly, "and in my own house I pour out for myself when I want a drink."

Clara went for another glass, saying in an undertone as she passed her father: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," and her eyes flashed angrily as she added, "when a gentleman comes to visit us."

Old Lippke glowered at her, without, however, making any answer; he crossed his legs angrily and looked straight in front of him with half-shut eyes as he waited in sullen spite to see what would happen next.

"Then I'll just tell you," Felgentreu explained with a suggestion of wrath in his voice. "I did send the things

and paid about enough for them to justify our expecting something fairly good, so you needn't be uneasy on your wife's account. 'There, that's all right,' he said, turning to the invalid with a quick resumption of his former gaiety. 'You ought to be glad to have such a good watch-dog, Frau Lippke. Don't be offended with me, Anton,' he went on frankly. 'I had no wish to trespass on your rights. The idea just struck me and I was anxious to do something.'

'That's all right,' and Lippke waved the matter aside with his hand. 'I knew nothing about it, of course. Don't make a fuss! What's the good of only two glasses?' he asked Clara. 'Making fine speeches about a gentleman visitor and leaving him with not a drop to wet his whistle.' Clara looked at him doubtfully for a minute, and then hastened away in high delight. 'But that's women all over, sniffing out a hundred yards off who it is that's showing a bit of politeness.'

'But when the lad said——' Frau Lippke began.

'Oh, rot what the lad said!' the old man promptly silenced her. 'You're in love with Felgentreu—that's all there is to it. Anyway, you shouldn't be talking all the time. How's that going to get you well again directly?'

His first words brought a faint flush to the thin cheeks, but at his last exhortation she crept, somewhat intimidated, into her shell, apparently intent on resuming, after this slight interruption, her efforts for a speedy recovery.

'But why doesn't Alma come near us?' Clara suddenly burst out—the wine meantime had been tested and met with general approval. 'Here we sit waiting for her day after day. She isn't ill still, surely?'

'Oh, Alma,' said Emil, looking up at her. 'She's still feeling the effects of her attack—you remember?' he inquired of the whole company. 'It always leaves her a little shy and disinclined to move; it has to take its time.'

'The poor child!' and Clara's voice expressed her

heartfelt pity. "Was it so bad as that? And now I can't even visit her and cheer her up! It is a good thing that at any rate we have you here," she added, and her honest eyes showed the real sincerity of her pleasure. But then she blushed and began to busy herself with her mother's bed, Felgentreu meantime watching her movements thoughtfully.

But now old Lippke suddenly exploded into a dissertation on politics, the very subject of which he had the least understanding, but one that provided him with the most convenient outlet for his discontent with life in general. The one thing he saw plainly was that most other people had too much money. He took that fact as his standpoint and always returned to it again and again.

His dissertation at last narrowed down to an attack on Felgentreu's lukewarm advocacy of the rights of the proletariat, since he had to give vent to his annoyance with him in some way or another.

"You married well," he began his attack, "but that does not free you—quite the opposite; you ought all the more to help your brothers against the rich and powerful. You used to be a much better party man, everybody says."

"I have no brothers," Felgentreu calmly answered; "never have had any."

"But you've got companions in need," said Lippke emphatically, "and a duty to your own class. With your intelligence and easy tongue and the good position you take in the factory with the masters, you might make a deal firmer stand for the rights of the workers, but you're always for half-and-half compromise. You've disappointed all of us no end with that, I can tell you. What have you got to say to that, if there's any sort of tongue in your head?"

Felgentreu set down his glass and got up to go home to dinner.

"You'll be having dinner too," he remarked absent-mindedly as he glanced round the room. "You've made

many objections, and I've little to say in reply. I tell you every creature has its own nature, and mine isn't yours. There are no doubt people who need co-operation, but there are others who must have independence. I've already told Alma that I am independent of my wife's money. Who can tell when that will suddenly be evident to everyone! But then, again, it won't suit you either. Well, Frau Lippke, go on getting better. My wife will wonder why I'm so long coming; she doesn't know yet that I have been here. It just occurred to me to pay you a flying visit. I'll give your love to Alma, Clara, and you, old Anton, needn't be so bitter about me; you'll just have to take me as I am."

"Then you might at least have put in a packet of the best tobacco," Lippke grumbled, "so that I might have felt I had a share in the basket as well. But no one thinks of what the husband has to put up with when his wife's ill."

"Well, it's not too late for that, even now," Felgentreu answered, a little ashamed of the old man and considerably avoiding all the eyes that were fixed on him, when, after a short hesitation, he turned to go. The two women sent modest greetings to Frau Meta, though neither of them ventured to ask why she too had never been near. At the door he met Julius just coming home and looking more slovenly and dusty than ever in his everyday clothes, although his moustache was as well brushed and belligerent as ever and he had lost none of his usual look of self-respect.

He started at first as he met the father of the visitor they had so long expected actually in their flat; for the moment he thought she must be ill, and his spirits fell at once, partly because he had had a very strenuous morning of dispensing and was, moreover, half-starving, as he had had no time to eat the lunch he had taken with him and would not touch it on the way home for fear of

spoiling his dinner. But when he grasped the meaning of Clara's cheerful look and her nod intended for him alone, a delicate flush rose to his cheeks as he gave their visitor a welcoming smile.

"Oh, Herr Felgentreu!" he said inquiringly with a little reserve as he bowed slightly, his head on one side; his arms hung fixed to his sides, and he made no movement to shake hands as he looked expectantly at the older man.

Felgentreu scanned the young fellow before he answered, then cordially offered his hand, which Julius eagerly took with another bow. "Well, been busy making pills?" Emil inquired in a friendly tone.

"Oh yes, we've been very busy to-day," Julius replied, assuming once more his serious bearing. "This influenza plague is literally raging. We have quite run out of menthol."

He relapsed into silence and again looked at Emil expectantly. Felgentreu felt a pity he could not explain for this tall lad and his hopes. He let his eyes wander round the room, which was so similar to his own. There stood a cupboard, there the sideboard; book-shelves and the clock hung on the wall—all the same, but everything of poorer quality and shabbier than in his home. Even the Emperor amongst the army pictures seemed less royal and plainly the ruler of a much poorer people. Heaven knows how the morose, dictatorial old man had managed to impress it all with his own atmosphere, but perhaps that fact is, after all, not so hard to explain. Moved by a generous impulse of sympathy with this poverty—or wretchedness, rather—Emil remembered what the young man wished him to say.

"I expect you want me to give you news of Alma," he remarked, with a sympathetic glance. "Ask your sister afterwards; she knows every bit as much as I do. Alma is going through a hard time; some take it more lightly,

but others are afraid. Have you read anything about telepathy, I wonder? It is quite possible that Alma's future depends on some prayer of yours—your fate and that of others as well. Who can tell? Watch and pray. Well, Heaven help you! I shall take her greetings from you."

No sooner had he said all this, with very serious, well-nigh saddened eyes, than he shook hands once more and went, with all the appearance of a troubled man. Julius in his surprise forgot to say good-bye, and on Clara, too, Felgentreu's words had left a deep and lasting impression, which was plainly evident during the next few days. Julius, on the other hand, felt depressed and anxious, for he could see that the danger threatening his hopes and desires was rapidly becoming more acute, and considered the preventive measure recommended by Emil extremely old-fashioned and unscientific; instead, he determined to question the other chemists about telepathy: perhaps there was some more scientific method of exercising influence from a distance—he would read up the subject. After an almost sleepless night, Julius thought he knew enough of the matter to see that at any rate it was a question of strong concentrated thought. So he set his whole mind to that, grew more and more silent, and passed along the streets with his head ever more deeply bent by the increasing gravity of his reflections. He decided, however, not to consult his superiors, as this was a matter of the heart.

Old Lippke had listened to Felgentreu's speech at the door, and although some of it had escaped him, what he did hear gave him much food for thought, and at dinner he made a few cautious allusions to it, without, however, managing to extricate from either son or daughter any of the missing links. Then he tried irony. "Don't make your fingers crooked with too many prayers," he counselled Julius, "or there'll be an end of writing books for

you." Or, "Good advice that: pray without ceasing! You needn't always fold the same fingers."

Julius paid no heed, and later on the old man began his tramp round the table, again seriously hindering Clara in her table-clearing operations.

So the rest of the family began their waiting again, whilst old Lippke kept his eyes and ears continually open, and no one felt the suspense of the rest of the week so unbearable, as they were sure their hopes must be realized on the coming Sunday. On that morning Julius, full of expectation, got up early and began the day by a walk in the Tiergarten. As yet few people were about; the sky was slightly overcast, but the air was full of light and there was a mysterious exhilaration about the opening day. The birds were in full song; as a rule Julius found such behaviour quite incomprehensible, but to-day it aroused his interest. Their notes resounded everywhere, and there was scarcely a tree without its little melodious lover. The laburnums were just bursting into flower, the syringas nearly over. Nearly all the shrubs showed some green leaves, but the trees were very backward, the oak, indeed, being still quite bare. A few gay boats lay on the cold, dark waters of the Spree, and the owners' little dogs sat on board, keenly on the look-out, or barking furiously when anyone teased them from the bridge. Julius as a rule was quite indifferent to such jokes, but to-day he looked and walked on with a feeling of amusement. The ducks were taking many a honeymoon swim in the water, and his attention was drawn to them by the gay colours of the drakes. Then it struck him how badly the seats needed painting; a fresh coat every two years was essential to preserve them, and he knew for a certainty that it was at least three years since they had had one. By degrees he got into the neighbourhood of the monuments; these had always impressed him, and he never understood why the Berlin folk made merry over them; the Victory Avenue

especially never failed to affect him deeply, and at no time could he walk between these white statues standing there in all their vainglory without a feeling of sober exaltation as their latest descendant.

He had made an early retreat from military service, but none the less he was convinced that Germany could never be conquered again. The military success of the Germans in the nineteenth century filled him with a satisfaction, not perhaps entirely without a commercial basis, but which nevertheless realized the highest aspiration of the more imaginative side of his nature.

He passed by the "tents," where there was much morning activity, with a glance of interest only and not even a passing thought of a glass of beer or something to eat; he was, it is true, distinctly hungry, but he intended to satisfy his appetite at the regular breakfast-table of his home, whither he was returning by the shortest possible way.

He arrived there not only refreshed, but almost gay, and he ate an ample breakfast with such enjoyment that the morning pallor of his cheeks was replaced by a bright colour.

Afterwards he gave himself a careful shave, and, that finished, he pondered as to whether he had not better put on his blue suit instead of yesterday's striped greenish clothes, which he was wearing at the moment. After long deliberation he came to the conclusion that he would look better in the blue suit, and changed. He also put on another tie, as in his opinion the blue suit craved a shade that carried out its own colour scheme instead of one that went well with the striped coat and trousers. All this, added to the brushing up of his moustache, took him a good hour, and meantime ten o'clock had struck and the church bells finished chiming; a ring at the bell might now be expected at any minute. He took a book and settled himself down by the window to read something

sensible whilst he was waiting, but it never occurred to him to look out for Alma.

Of course, he was reading about telepathy. Julius was extremely well satisfied with the result of the experiments, and for a considerable time forgot that he was waiting for Alma. When Clara came in suddenly to call him to dinner he gazed at her as though he had just dropped from the clouds.

There had been a perceptible change for the worse in the invalid's condition during the last twenty-four hours. On Saturday evening her temperature had suddenly run up to 106° , and from time to time the patient had periods of unconsciousness. But between these—perhaps as the result of some disturbance in mind or body—she surprised the onlookers by her complete return to consciousness and an inquiring or wondering gaze round the room. The old man, puffing out clouds of smoke, kept up an excited march round the table nearly the whole morning long; only when he heard a knock at the front-door—for Clara had hung up a card asking everyone to knock instead of ringing—he ran, like a badger to his hole, back into the sick-room and sat down again with crossed legs to give the impression that he was spending a calm, composed Sunday morning and thinking of nothing else whatever. If Alma had come, he would scarcely have taken any notice of her. But when he saw it was once more nothing, he indulged in a disappointed expectoration, and in two or three minutes, finding a further stay in the bedroom beyond his powers of endurance, he went back to the living-room and began his hurried circuit once more. To-day, moreover, for the first time he felt there was something uncanny about his wife, and was not quite sure he might not catch some infection; his own health was the one thing for which he harboured the most tender feelings of which he was capable; so, as a matter of principle, he did not once allow his pipe to go out, as he

believed smoking to be a sure preventive of all contagion. If he ever felt the least unwell himself he had to have all imaginable kinds of medicinal teas and continual hot fomentations round his body. He would be so irritable and abusive that his womenfolk would have liked to run miles out of his way, but he would let neither of them out of his sight, and if one ever did close his bedroom door behind her with a sigh of relief, she was at once recalled to hear of a fresh disturbing symptom; and if they would not listen to him, he flew into a passion, tore out of the room in his shirt, and if he came upon his daughter sitting quietly at the window with her sewing he would accuse her furiously of trying to kill him. The slightest distaste for his pipe was quite enough to put the fear of death into him and to fill him with the greatest anxiety, in spite of all the aperients that he took as a precautionary measure.

This, then, was the reason why his wife might have enjoyed the greater measure of relief from his watchful eyes if only the increase in fever had not spoilt her full appreciation of this pleasure, although, indeed, she never ceased to feel grateful every time she woke and found he was not in the room. She could no longer keep count of the passing hours; the one fact that it was Sunday was all that her aching head and confused brain could retain with the greatest pertinacity. Even meal-times gave her no help, for all day long she only got broth, weak coffee, a beaten egg, or *zwieback*. Her illness had reached that critical state against which an invalid fights as long as possible, and which overcomes the mortal frame quite suddenly as the forerunner of imminent death—a state when the world recedes, men become mere shadows, all sense of place is lost, time stands still and suffering alone is real. She began to whisper, and her unconscious moans were unmistakable signs that she was already feeling the pressure of death's cold grasp. It was now only a question of whether, even at this last moment, she would be able

to escape from his cruel hands and come back to earth once more. And it was this that old Lippke sensed with a feeling of mysterious terror. In the hope of counteracting such an appalling fear the old man set himself to consider all the rules and regulations that he would impose upon Clara for his wife's recovery when once this crisis was past, and the thought of the many imperative demands he could make was almost enough to give him back his former calm. The sense of his circumspection and inexorable authority gave him a preliminary feeling of satisfaction and made it possible for him to experience a certain sense of self-respect, for, with the exception of bodily pleasures, he valued nothing so much as the mental pose of an implacable, far-seeing domestic tyrant.

All at once he ran into the kitchen to "whip up" Clara, as the afternoon coffee was already more than half an hour overdue.

"What sort of housekeeping are you at to-day?" Thus his attack began before he had even crossed the threshold. "I suppose I am to swill my inside with the whole lot at one go—coffee, soup, cake and potatoes. Haven't you got enough yet with one sick person?"

He was perfectly well aware that Clara had kept back the coffee so long simply for reasons of hospitality, but this hospitality was exactly what was beginning to embitter him. Moreover, she had, in preparation for all emergencies, added cake-making to her other work, an unnecessary expense that roused his wrath just as keenly as his insatiable greed demanded instant satisfaction. An overdue meal had never failed to produce one of his attacks of "nerves."

It would be far from true to state that the cake was not duly appreciated when it did at last appear. The old man showed not the slightest falling off in his capacity for its consumption. Even Julius too, in spite of his low spirits, had not the strength of mind to allow his father to take

advantage of him even to-day. Clara alone was firm in her self-restraint, and was the only one able to keep her second slice for the next day—indeed, one of the men must have taken the mother's share as well, for although the cake was its usual size, not a crumb was left over.

Coffee finished, old Lippke resumed his uneasy walk round the table, for the quantity of cake he had eaten really did not agree with him and gave him in half-an-hour's time a distinct sense of oppression, which, however, he ascribed to the unpunctuality of the meal, and grew perceptibly more ill-tempered in consequence. His smoke, too, seemed less to his taste, and he tried another brand of tobacco without better results. In a distinctly bad temper he then betook himself to the sick-room, where a sense of weary depression added to his other afflictions. At a quarter-past six he began to change his clothes, his ill-humour having now come to a climax. His hands and knees were twitching, a weakness that he found more unbearable than all else. In his younger days he had always been very proud of his firm muscles, and he viewed the approach of the infirmities of old age with the deepest dissatisfaction. If Felgentreu had sent the special brand of tobacco, he would have had at hand a remedy to restore his physical well-being, for nothing cheered up a man so much as a superior brand of tobacco, or even a good cigar; if Emil had had the slightest sense of remorse, or a touch of real friendship, he would have felt compelled to rise even to a small box of those. But that was Felgentreu all over. That evening when they were coming home from the bodega, and he (Lippke) had expressed the modest wish that he could take a bottle of wine home with him to his wife, Felgentreu had kept mum as death, but the next day had played the grand gentleman with his present without the slightest hint that he had got the idea from Lippke himself.

"Felgentreu," he growled aloud at last, and almost

unconsciously he went on thinking aloud: "Felgentreu¹ indeed! Felgenfaithless his name ought to be! To hell with the whole crew!" In his wrath he flung his Sunday trousers away into a corner, following them up with the tie and collar that he snatched from his neck. Julius was sitting by his sick mother's bedside, but so intent on his anxious observation of the symptoms, which he had been reading up, that he never noticed the old man. He was entirely absorbed by his filial fear of a fatal issue and the impending desolation with which he was threatened. The young man felt plainly what his mother had meant to him hitherto, and in affectionate distress he took her withered hand in his as if to hold her back. "Just making sport of you, they are," old Lippke's soliloquy went on—"leading you by the nose. First a grand invitation to coffee and talk of engagement; then 'faint turns' all at once. What's the reason of them? Now you're opening your jaws in surprise, but your roast dove doesn't fly in, however much you beg and pray."

Now Julius had certainly not opened his "jaws in surprise"; on the contrary he had, all unobserved, lifted his mother's fingers to his cheek to see how hot or cold they were. It was the word "pray" that first made him look up inquiringly, which was just what old Lippke had been aiming at. But the invalid had awakened too, and was listening with wide-open, feverish eyes. Clara was not there.

Old Lippke went on, glad to find an outlet for his wrath: "What's the sense of all that about praying? A matter either succeeds in the ordinary way or fails. If you'd been with us last Monday in the bodega you'd know a bit more than you do. I'll just prove to you now that you are one of the proletariat. What is it that shows a man to be of the lower class? That you always come off worst and are the one to be trapped. Well, now, you are

¹ Treu=faithful, loyal.

to get a dowry of 10,000 marks and another 10,000 cash down. Last Monday Felgentreu said he would give up all claim at his wife's death to her property in favour of his—of your—young woman. That gives another 30,000. Now you may know what you're to pray for, namely, that the young lady should make up her mind to take you to save her good name. You know, too, what the 'faint turns' meant. Yes, yes, an old far-sighted father always comes in useful," he boasted, disappointed in the effect achieved by his remarks. "Where would you raw greenhorns get to if you hadn't me? Ah! this cursed heartburn. I must take a little glass of port wine; I feel quite bad, old man that I am! Well, well, you'll be sold and betrayed if you lose your strength. Where's the cursed glass? Think of such a thing in the evening of my days!"

With trembling hands he seized the port-wine bottle and uncorked it, then fumbled about for the glass. As he tried to fill it, more wine went outside than in, and he emptied the glass so eagerly that at least half ran into his beard. It was evident he no longer had the strength for such excitement as that in which he had indulged through the whole of the day. He heard, moreover, a sudden rattling sound from the sick-bed, and at once knew its dread meaning. But almost more dreadful was the impression made on him by the dead silence with which his son listened to his flood of eloquence. The cold sweat on his brow bore witness to his mental disturbance as he seized his working garments and finished changing his clothes. Whilst Julius, half beside himself with grief, was struggling to help his mother, who seemed at the very point of death, his father went on with a continuous stream of incoherent muttering, accompanied by gestures of horror and aversion. No sooner had he scrambled into such clothes as were absolutely indispensable than, casting a side-glance at his sick wife, he left the bedroom and returned

to the parlour, where he spent the time of waiting for supper in a hurried, almost unconscious, march round and round, that betrayed his anxious perturbation. He was, indeed, so unaccustomed to a sense of shame that its advent caused him the most acute suffering. "Such idiotic gabble!" he thought in his consternation. His humiliating defeat in his son's presence touched his pride as head of the family, and the terrible rattling sound that followed him through the closed door threatened his honour as a citizen and official with the hint of a suspicion that he might possibly have "murdered his wife." Such a self-accusation was gall and bitterness when added to the constant sense of his insignificance and want of success that embittered his life. He no longer dared to look his son in the face. After supper, in spite of his terror, he stole once more into the sick-room to search amongst the bottles for some wine to help digestion, and finding vermouth, he opened it to relieve the pressure in his stomach. His wife was still wildly delirious and fighting with her poor thin arms. Once she sat up straight and stared at him, but did not recognize him, and fell back with a groan on to her pillows again. A cold shudder passed through her husband as he hastily emptied the glass and took his departure.

CHAPTER X

THE Felgentreus were more or less kept on tenterhooks by the illness of little Frau Lippke and the question as to whether and when Alma should pay her first return visit there. But no word was said on either subject; after the prospects that Frau Felgentreu had held out to Alma on the Sunday evening and those which Emil put finally before her on the Monday, there was nothing more to be

said, and all three felt they must wait the turn of events. Meantime the two women turned their attention to the dress which they had already discussed. Their first step was an expedition to the town to buy material; this they undertook in the morning, to leave the afternoon free for Alma's visit to the Lippkes. Meta thought her proposal to buy what was needed at Wertheim's a very reasonable one, but Alma was much more in favour of Cord's, a silk store, thus plainly showing her views as to the material that should be chosen; such an establishment for silk wares only was not the place to go to for cotton goods. But Meta was not one of those mothers who yield in a moment, and Alma went through a time of real anxiety and struggle in consequence. Meta, with her ripe experience, was able to put forward so many disadvantages of silk and satin that Alma felt a sense of reluctant regret overshadow her prejudice in their favour, although this in no way diminished her liking for them. They could not buy good silk, Meta said, as it was too dear, and a cheaper quality looked very common, did not wear and would never hang nicely. What did Alma think of muslin? But Alma had her own methods of defence, and to such questions as these she never vouchsafed an answer, as past experience had shown her that they were only pitfalls in disguise, and the examples quoted by Meta in the electric railway as they proceeded on their way, of other young women and ladies who had been most successful with the last-mentioned material, were received by her niece in silent contempt.

So Frau Felgentreu, with a slight sigh, went with Alma to Wertheim's, for she was already quite sure that the purchase would not be made without a bitter contest. At the counter Alma first displayed her tactics in all their efficiency; one after another the materials were dismissed as unsuitable coverings for her beautiful person, and always for a reason that would appeal to her aunt. For

instance, she would most reasonably point out that the colour was in all probability by no means fast, or that there was far too little wool in it for the price. "Don't you remember that brown dress I once had? It was the same stuff, and how dissatisfied you were with it yourself!" In short, she showed what she had learnt from her foster-mother. When she plainly declared that a material was "far too dear," Meta felt the argument unanswerable, whilst if a pattern was shown that seemed to fulfil every requirement, Alma's eyes assumed an absent-minded look, expressive of bored vexation, and no power on earth could make her show the slightest sign of interest. When materials, patience, strength and good temper were all alike at an end, Meta and Alma moved over to the print counter. But there, indeed, Alma rose to the heights of indifference. In masterly fashion she strictly avoided any discussion of the patterns, only answering all inquiries with "Perhaps," "As you like," or "I don't know," whilst her eyes were busy looking at everything except the cotton materials. Meta, knowing very well that it would be quite useless to show the slight annoyance she felt at these methods of opposition, asked for the silk department. "You can find what you think suitable here," she shortly declared to her niece. "I'm not going to Cord's—make up your mind to that. You know how much I am prepared to spend." Amongst the silks she reversed their former rôles, and now herself assumed the character of the person to be conciliated, with the result that Alma, before five minutes had passed, showed all her usual amiability of manner, at no greater cost to Meta than the price of the material which her niece had chosen. It was a pretty Scotch plaid, and Alma knew her foster-mother well enough to realize that no power on earth would have induced her to pay for it had she considered it a poor bargain. So the contest ended for the girl in satisfaction that she had got her own way

as regarded silk, and for Meta in similar triumph over her decided refusal to make the purchase at Cord's. For the rest, they were both tired and overstrung, and Meta congratulated herself on having the dinner all ready in the fireless cooker, so that she did not have to rush home and then stand over the fire.

This fireless cooker was another of Emil's wonderful contrivances, and Meta's thoughts turned with gratitude to her husband as she rested and drank a cup of clear soup in the refreshment-room whilst Alma was in another department choosing a pattern befitting the robe of victory. When she at last came back with it, she looked so worn out that Meta refused to go home with her until she too had had some refreshment. Thus complete harmony was restored by the mutual interchange of motherly care and filial obedience.

The pattern, however, proved to have its difficulties, and Meta thought it doubtful if they really could make the dress themselves, but in this point Alma was not going to fail in generosity. She foresaw the etceteras would mount up to far more than the price that had been fixed originally, so that the saving of the expense of a dress-maker was not a mere question of honour alone. Immediately dinner was finished she set to work eagerly, spreading out, marking the pattern, calculating, and using her scissors under Meta's careful supervision, so that when the time came for their afternoon cup of coffee the cutting-out was practically finished.

Meta fancied that she would now feel she had done enough for to-day, and perhaps go to the Lippkes, but such an idea never seemed to strike her. She made the coffee, laid the table, and as they took their afternoon meal her brain was still evolving new and efficient methods. The table was scarcely cleared when she fetched the model from its home in her bedroom and began to get the seams into place. But as she could barely

wait to see the dress take some sort of shape, she suddenly cast aside all recognized methods of procedure and began, in defiance of all rules, to drape and pin on the model until one side of the dress-to-be more or less assumed the elegant lines of its ultimate beauty. Nor did she seem ill-pleased with the result, although Meta, who now for the first time saw how it was meant to turn out, began to raise her objections. With heartfelt horror she exclaimed: "You'll surely not go about with such a narrow skirt!" adding, moreover, that it was too short by a full hand's-breadth; as to the neck opening proposed, she simply refused to listen to a word in its favour. And since it became apparent that Alma was equally determined to have her own way, the whole garment ceased for the moment to provide a subject for conversation. After this serious difference of opinion, the same want of harmony extended to all other conversational possibilities, with the result that Emil, on his return home, was once again amazed at the silence that reigned at certain times in his flat. The dressed-up model was still to the fore, and as soon as he had greeted his wife, Emil turned his attention to this object. Unlike Meta, he thoroughly approved of it all and made no attempt to hide his appreciation of the present-day fashion under any kind of bushel, whether old or new. This attitude his wife recognized as typical of him.

"Things will come to such a pitch next that women will only twist two yards of muslin round their bodies and be done with it!" was her scornful comment. "Then I suppose you'll sing their praises again!"

"I don't know about that!" he replied, reserving an entire liberty of opinion. "I must see it first. But, joking apart, Meta dear, a woman must so order her dress attractions—well, then, with the one object of being attractive. You see, legs and arms, feet and neck, are special gifts of Providence, not intended to be covered up and

hidden away. If the limbs from hip to ankle move along merrily, and a quick little foot appears from time to time below the hem of the skirt—well, it gives me pleasure! And I must confess I'm all in favour of low necks—of course, all in moderation." This qualifying clause was added as he noticed the appearance of a somewhat meditative expression in his wife's eyes. "It just depends!"

"Then all I can do is to put on a flag like this," she remarked with a touch of irritation. "No one cares to be left behind. Nothing above and nothing below, and the rest transparent into the bargain—then I shall get a good mark from you . . .!"

"Now, mother, you've got that already!" and his laugh was conciliatory as he put his arm round her waist. "And what a good mark! quite beyond your powers of calculation! But to speak of something else, Meta. I pawned your watch to-day. What do you say to that?"

"My watch?" she asked in amazement, freeing herself from an embrace to which she had submitted with but ill grace. "How pawned? Was that necessary?"

"How? Well, I thought to myself: you may as well pledge Meta's watch for once, so that your future sister-in-law may have her pleasure straight away. I sent her a basketful of presents, as her chill was my fault, and I hadn't enough money to pay, Meta."

She was not ill-pleased at this news. A look of friendliness crept over her face, and she looked with approval at a man with such impulses. So did Alma, although there was a touch of suspicion in her sidelong glance which, however, no one noticed at the moment.

"That was just the right action for the bride's father." Meta's voice bore evidence to her satisfaction. "But you shouldn't drag such a poor soul on to a roundabout; why, she is always cold without that. If we two have a joke like that it's quite another matter; I can stand a good deal."

This little incident gave her secret pleasure for the rest of the evening and increased her affection for her husband, although she took care not to let him see any signs of it that day—indeed, when bedtime came, she was more reserved than usual, a fact that Emil noticed without, however, commenting upon it.

Yet on Wednesday morning she made her appearance in the sitting-room with a more serious and composed air, seemed somewhat reserved and taciturn, like someone who is waiting for something definite, and Alma knew exactly of what she was thinking. The girl herself appeared half-afraid, half on her guard, as if warding off any inquiries as to her intentions, but she felt ill at ease in these efforts, especially as she had awakened that morning with a sense of helplessness that already disturbed her by an intuition of its probable increase.

"What about that narrow short skirt and the low neck?" Meta inquired. "Have you slept over the matter?"

This apparently Alma had done.

"Nothing can be done about the skirt," she answered, with a little regretful shrug of her shoulders. "You see, that is cut out now." She kept, however, a discreet silence about the low neck.

"Well, I am glad you will listen to reason to-day," Meta replied. "A good deal can be remedied when one is really in earnest." And she set about this remedial process, whilst Alma stood idly by, watching her with eyes that only too plainly betrayed her vexation. Frau Meta decided that the hem and seams were amply wide enough to lengthen the skirt by three or four inches and to add a good half-foot to its width. It seemed to Alma that she was adding fully a yard to its length and seven to the width, but an all-seeing, impartial eye would have discovered that all Meta could effect, in spite of her most strenuous efforts, was to add about an inch below and perhaps four in circumference. Alma took no more

pleasure in her frock after it had been "hacked" about like that, so worked badly, and was both moody and sulky, with the result that Meta lost all pleasure too in her foster-daughter. Even though she herself worked all the harder because her nature would allow nothing else, she got but few thanks for it, and, taken as a whole, she felt the day one of ceaseless effort and disappointment. About coffee-time Alma suddenly threw herself upon the machine and worked for two hours on end without stirring from her chair, acting as though this wretched frock was the only thing worth considering in the whole of creation. By evening, the dress was finished, with the exception of the sleeves, which she was reserving as a special *chef-d'œuvre* for the morrow. Then, almost as suddenly as she had begun her work, Alma packed it all away, and started with the same deadly determination the evening cooking operations, leaving Meta at liberty to follow her own devices. But as she did all this, Alma had the greatest difficulty in not breaking out into loud sobs. She had nothing but condemnation for a character that made her what she was, and would not let her be different, more cheerful, gayer, pleasanter to others. By way of achieving some approximation to this ideal of hers, she set herself to think what dish Felgentreu most disliked, to show, by making it, to all concerned how little she cared for him, since she quite correctly surmised that, if there were no Felgentreu question in the house, there would be none of Lippke either. So she set to work and baked a kind of flat cake of oat flakes that tasted of nothing, whose only merit was to fill the stomach, except, of course—most important of all—that it was Felgentreu's pet aversion. She was, however, disappointed in its final success. At any other time, even if Meta had been the cook of this very ordinary invalid food, Felgentreu would have grumbled, turned it about on his plate like a child, daintily eaten a few mouthfuls, and then gone in open

rebellion to the kitchen to cut himself a slice of bread and to ransack the larder for meat or sausage, following these up by an attack on the marmalade jar, in spite of Meta's protests of the unsuitability of marmalade at dinner-time; it was only meant to be eaten at breakfast and afternoon coffee. But nothing of the kind happened on this occasion. After Meta, with secret wrath, had discovered the projected ill-treatment of her husband, when it was too late to prevent it, she saw, to her astonishment, that after a single inquiring glance at Alma's face he sat down quietly and began to eat as if everything was as it should be. The only one to hesitate and pick at her food was Alma, whilst Emil began his usual chat, following this up a little later with such oracular dissertations that only those who knew him intimately could guess that he was feeling in any way upset. It did not escape Meta's notice, and Alma, at least, saw that she had only achieved the very opposite of what she had intended, and her consternation in consequence made the rest of the evening one of pure discomfort for her. Later on, as they were sitting together in apparent peace and harmony, another incident occurred. Emil had just finished one of his domestic lectures, and as he quite casually produced his cigarette-case—he had for some little time given up smoking a pipe—and opened it, before helping himself, he offered it to Alma quite naturally, as though nothing had happened. He did not even look at her, but spoke with a laugh to Meta, who, as he knew, was not to be tempted with cigarettes. Alma turned a little pale as she started back with a hasty refusal and at once bent over her work again. She now had resumed operations on Meta's cross-stitch cushion once more. "What now?" Felgentreu exclaimed in amazement. "You don't object to one as a rule!" For a moment his eyes rested affectionately on her bowed head, and then he turned to his wife as he said: "Look here, mother, isn't there too

much sewing-done now, I wonder? Isn't she overdoing it a little?"

That evening Meta undressed almost in the dark; she was silent, although not depressed, and had to wait long for sleep to come. She noticed from her husband's light, rhythmical breathing that he, too, was awake, and, with a touch of silent indignation, she thought that in all probability Alma was lying sleepless as well. It oppressed her, too, that Emil seemed not to care in the least whether Alma had been to the Lippkes that afternoon or not, and it was all she could do to fight down the oppressive sense of loneliness due to his attitude in this matter.

On the Thursday morning Alma looked ill both in mind and body, a fact Meta noticed with mingled anxiety and rising wrath. Mindful of Emil's objection, she proposed giving up dressmaking for to-day, but whether Alma suffered or not from her own stubborn perversity, there it was in full force, driving her on in a manner so painful to herself that she had not a moment's breathing-space during the whole of the day. Behind her, Meta like the sea, in front a swamp in the shape of Lippke, and overhead Felgentreu, a threatening tempest in very truth! Such was and remained her position. She was now so worn out and driven, after a morning filled to excess with her self-imposed tasks, that about midday, without any apparent cause but a sudden attack of sheer clumsiness, she let fall before Meta's very eyes a whole trayful of plates and other crockery with such violence that everything was smashed to atoms.

For the moment she was struck dumb by the enormity of her own deed, and then burst into a nervous peal of laughter that made her aunt flush with vexation.

"A laughing matter indeed!" was her angry comment. "Pull yourself together, if you know how. There are limits to everything, my girl!"

Alma cleared away the broken bits in silence, but in

such absent-minded dejection that Meta felt grieved for her. Under any other circumstances she would have thought of some encouraging word or a joke, and it was this Alma was awaiting, feeling ready to kiss her hand in return, and even though she certainly would not have actually done so, she would yet have felt the gratitude due to her aunt as the older and injured woman. But a little well of bitterness had already gathered even in Meta's soul, and this made it impossible for her to give magnanimous treatment to the struggles of youth.

Most upset and somewhat angry, she waited for Emil to come, feeling quite ready for an open declaration of war, if for no other reason than to put an end to this terrible state of suffocating suspense. Unfortunately he was a full half-hour behind his time, and when he did appear at last in his usual good-humour and quite unconscious of any fault on his part, Meta for once began to take him to task.

"You've no doubt been meeting some dear friends—either gentlemen or ladies—on your way home?" she inquired in a slightly aggressive tone. "Now you'll have to eat burnt meat and overcooked vegetables."

He turned his eyes towards her with one of those wise and understanding glances that always disarmed her with their evident affection, and answered in a warmer tone than usual, as he felt that she was really suffering:

"I fancy it won't be so bad as that, wife! Your warmed-up things always taste better than other folks' fresh-cooked dishes. But, you see, I had to go and see myself how Frau Lippke was. The old man gets out of my way, or something of the sort, and after not being able to speak to him yesterday evening I did nothing but worry—so I just paid a flying visit.

"We are talking about your future mother-in-law," he added, as his greeting to Alma, when he and his wife entered the sitting-room together. "What the heart

thinks of . . . Well, she is very feverish," he said, turning gravely to his wife again—"more than 104° the thermometer says; it will perhaps turn to pneumonia, the doctor thinks. They send kind messages to all—to you, too, Alma, and Frau Lippke said you must get quite well again. And now, I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Without further delay he went and sat down, unfolding his dinner-napkin in eager expectation. Alma, too, left her place by the machine and came to the table. If anyone had chanced to look at her then he would have noticed a look of relief and hope instead of her usual depressed expression. Once more Emil had brought her a reprieve, and even whilst her heart was already palpitating at the prospect of the mingled defiance and helplessness of this terrible third afternoon, she suddenly found that quite unexpectedly all her difficulties had vanished—indeed, she had even been exhorted to get quite well first. She felt so full of gratitude that almost involuntarily she said: "Then I'll go and inquire again to-morrow." And, somewhat abashed by the two pairs of eyes that turned in her direction, she added: "One never knows what such an illness may turn into. And besides . . ."

A short silence followed her words. Then Meta replied calmly and with a scarcely perceptible warmth in her tone: "Yes, do, child." And still speaking with a certain deliberation, she continued, in answer to Alma's words: "But we will hope for the best and anticipate nothing else. And your dress is now certain to be ready for you Sunday."

Emil then began, between his mouthfuls, to talk of old Lippke, came back again to Frau Stina, mentioned Clara, and expressed, almost as if by chance, his appreciation of her brother's character and disposition. He did not look at Alma as he spoke, nor make any reference to her announcement, but it all made such a favourable impression that, for the first time in the week, a glimmer of their customary cordiality revived in the little dinner-party,

and for to-day, at any rate, there was no longer any question of the declaration of open warfare that Meta had felt inclined to make.

So the afternoon passed cheerfully enough. The dress could now for the first time be tried on the living model, and both the pattern and its execution were found worthy of the highest praise. Since the pattern was designed, as patterns always are, for a faultless figure, and as Alma could at any rate boast of something not far short of this, scarcely any alterations were needed. It is true that a difference of opinion flared up again about the hem of the skirt, but Alma at once took up a fighting attitude and began her side-glances and shuffling, so that Meta, with flushed cheeks, did not yield indeed, but gave up further discussion of the point in question, and thus secured peace until the evening. Partly out of gratitude or as a gesture of conciliation, Alma then saw to it that, in contrast to the day before, Emil should have one of his favourite dishes, which proved to be baked potatoes and *Grützsturst*¹ sausage, dripping with fat and mustard; hence his undoing.

When he saw how the land lay to-day, he was anxious to contribute his quota as well, so fetched a bottle of wine; not that he ever needed much persuasion to do that, be it Sunday or weekday. Then he suddenly dug out from the depths of his cupboard an old zither that he had not played for Heaven knows how long. He took some time tuning-up and strumming, then played a *Ländler*,² following it up with a waltz, and finished off the first part of his performance with a gay Tyrolese dance-tune from the days of his youth.

Meta again looked serious; this, however, apparently escaped his notice, as he began a lively account of his wanderings through the German lands, singing the

¹ A favourite sausage, much like an English pigs'-pudding.

² A folk-dance tune.

praises of liberty, the open sky and the wide world; he certainly addressed himself to both his womenfolk, but it ended by Alma alone being his real audience, for most of his tales she had never heard before. Her cheeks flushed a little as she listened, but any chance thought of Julius seemed to awake memories of continuous, unceasing wet weather, and nothing did she find more unendurable than a country downpour. But at last Meta's silence attracted her attention and filled her with a fresh sense of uneasiness. At a fitting moment Emil produced his zither again, although he too had meantime noticed his wife's attitude. "Now look at that!" his thoughts ran in unison with hers. "I haven't touched the thing for ages, yet the girl only has to cook a sausage for me and there I am in full swing at once. Well, I wonder what Meta will have to say to me about it!" So, contrary to all expectation, the evening ended on a note of depression.

Its immediate effect on Alma was, however, one at which she herself was astonished; it even began as she was undressing. She always liked to dawdle in the evening, but never in her life had she been so oblivious of all considerations of time and place as to-day. Twelve struck and found her still sitting at the window, half-undressed, with her long plaits hanging over her shoulders, gazing with her heart full of reproach at the dull grey clouds as they hurried across the midnight sky. It had been wrong of her to vent her temper on Felgentreu's dinner yesterday, and certainly not right either to give him his favourite dish to-day. Do what she would, it all turned out badly. But that was due to her perverse and ungrateful nature, that repaid all the love and self-sacrifice in this home of hers with sulky discontent, and she pondered long and sadly as to why she could not alter this.

Why, even to-day she had been quite prepared to "explode" again about the hem of her dress. She wondered if she inherited this weakness from the mother of

whom she knew so little, and of whom Meta always spoke with such reserve or with such indulgence, if she happened to mention her. Next she set herself to a serious consideration of her life in other respects and found nothing but confusion. Already even the coming afternoon towered before her again as a wall that shut out all else. But little by little her lover's form grew more and more distinct, and with it the consciousness that her whole relationship to him could only end in deceit, or at least in disappointment. "It can't go on like this," she thought, with a shake of her head. "When all's said and done, he is an honourable man."

At last she turned resolutely to her table, took pen and paper and began to write. The result was a letter to Julius, in which she told him humbly and kindly that unfortunately she found herself unable to become his wife, since she was not good enough for him. But the letter came to a sudden stop and proved so impossible to finish that she tore it to bits and, much annoyed, began another. Now, however, she wrote in quite a different strain, telling him she had decided to become his wife because she could not but respect his good qualities and because everyone desired the marriage, but she must tell him that she did not "love" him in the ordinary sense of the word, although she respected him and would obey him as far as was in her power. She therefore felt she must first point out to him some unpleasant points in her character. In spite, however, of long meditation, she could not get to the root of the matter sufficiently to name these defects, and in the end she thought the whole thing nonsense, and with increased annoyance began a third letter. In this she reverted to the contents of the first, and informed Julius tersely and politely that she found it impossible to marry him, and begged his forgiveness, at the same time informing him that she was at once leaving her uncle's home, as she was

no longer worthy of their confidence. She felt a certain sense of gloomy satisfaction in this letter as she folded and put it in a stamped envelope, which she inscribed "personal" before writing the address. Next she went through all her belongings and made a selection of those that seemed indispensable to begin with; some underclothing, a pair of shoes, a dress, two or three blouses, and an extra skirt left no spare room in her week-end case. She gave another look in the cupboard where travelling-cases were kept, but no larger suit-case was to be found. She could not but feel sadly disappointed as she looked at all she had to leave behind—far the larger and most important half of her worldly possessions—her best dresses, petticoats, white summer clothing and shoes; her Sunday hat and pretty winter coat with the fox-skin collar, extorted in the usual way from her aunt; her dancing shoes, her little ball-dress, her vases, boxes, cases, bric-à-brac of all kinds; her photograph album, her inkstand with the bronze stag carrying the small inkpot between his antlers, and the pretty little clock with four tiny pillars that Felgentreu had given her. All this, with a great deal more, she had to leave in her room, and, greatly as she esteemed her aunt, she knew she could never expect to see the things again unless she came and fetched them herself. With a feeling of utter discouragement she sat down on the little sofa. Her aunt, moreover, had the charge of her savings-bank book, with its deposit of 630 marks, all made up of birthday and holiday presents from the Felgentreus. Such a thing as she was planning would no doubt also put an end to the dowry and inheritance, no matter whom she might marry in after-days. All this weakened her resolve to run away and strengthened her determination to stay. But at least she had three days' respite before Sunday, and in that time much might happen. Unable to come to any definite conclusion, she at last got into bed, and after a night of broken

sleep and bad dreams, rose the next morning in timid depression and prepared for an unspeakably bitter contest.

Meta's heart sank when she saw her like this; she said nothing, however, and hoped she had entirely concealed her thoughts, but Alma's first passing glance at those large grey eyes was enough to show her what her aunt's feelings really were. And the day did indeed turn into a mute but dogged struggle between these two souls. Meta felt herself powerless against the increased opposition in Alma's wavering indecision; she felt at last that the girl would provoke her to mortal sin, but now she had too keen a memory of the zither music to leave the final victory to be decided by the fortune of war, as she had done two days ago; this time she had made up her mind to show the most unyielding determination. So she kept all the tactics sternly in her own hands, made no false steps, left no opening for violence or sudden attack, showed such patience as might well drive her opponent to despair and an equanimity that often made Alma tremble. The tartan dress was finished in spite of all this mental strife, and after dinner Alma ironed the lining in the kitchen, taking as much time over it as would have sufficed to smooth out the frocks of a whole girls' school. Her aunt, with full understanding, left her in peace, and as soon as she reappeared Meta put an end to the silent misery by sending her out on an errand.

"Take your time," she said. "Go a little walk, for you haven't been out all the week, and you needn't be back before seven."

Such unexpected half-holidays had before this surprised her now and again when Meta thought she was in need of a little relaxation and freedom. To-day Alma understood that an opportunity was being given her to carry out her proposed visit. But a cold shudder passed through her at the mere thought, and even Clara's merry glances had lost their attraction. She left the house without any

fixed plan and with none of the zest that she usually showed on such occasions—indeed, she did not yet know what to do with the time at her disposal. She carried out the little commission, which took her half-way to the Lippkes, but then, with a feeling of repulsion, turned aside sharply, took an electric tram and went to the Tiergarten. There she sat the whole time in a café, brooding over a cup of chocolate, quite unconscious of her surroundings, and returned home in the evening no better than when she had started.

Meantime Meta, with a feeling of utter helplessness, had tried to occupy herself with domestic matters, although for a considerable time she could not make up her mind what to do or leave undone—a very significant state of mind in a woman of her active and decided temperament. At last, scarcely knowing how it came about, she experienced a desire to see and feel on the spot itself, and found herself going towards Alma's room. She entered in some anxiety, and, after some heart-searching, sat down on the little couch. The room was full of the atmosphere of a healthy young creature, of fresh air and clean clothes, mingled with a touch of fragrance from Alma's violet-scented soap. Meta was conscious, as she sat there listening and observing, more with an inner perception than with physical sense, of much sad and erring love re-echoing on every side. Her eyes opened a little more widely as she studied every object that met her gaze. Here lay an ivory pen-holder and a Moor's head pen-wiper; the child had tried to bring the somewhat business-like blotting-pad more into accord with its surroundings by painting it with a few flowers—of an indefinite character, it is true, but still flowers. There stood the washstand, with its glittering glasses—Alma had a veritable passion for cleanliness. A little set of shelves provided a resting-place for the small, bright manicure articles that she had received as presents

now and again. Meta looked at them with an impulse of maternal sympathy, even though they were somewhat superfluous, in her opinion. On the table, beside the writing-case, lay Alma's account-book; this Meta picked up and examined. There stood the clear, firm figures exactly under one another, and she did not need to calculate the amount carried forward, since she was convinced it was correct. She replaced the little book half-dreamily and had absent-mindedly taken up the writing-case, when below it she caught sight of a letter all ready for the post. She gazed fixedly at the "Herr Julius Lippke," etc., as she turned it over in her hands. What might it contain? Why should she write to Lippke unless they had in any case come to an understanding or unless she was giving him his *congé*? She felt she knew nothing of this child who had always been so difficult to manage. Evidently she was still undecided, as she had not taken the letter with her. "Heaven help her!" she thought, with a shake of her head. "Heaven help us all!" With a heart-felt sigh she laid down the letter and stood up. She cast a glance of sad inquiry over the pictures and view-cards on the walls, and was turning to go with an even heavier heart than she had brought with her, when her eyes fell on the week-end case. "Well, what's that thing doing here?" she murmured in surprise, as she approached it slowly, as though half-dreading the discovery of a secret not meant for her. Then, as she stooped and lifted it, she found it was packed, and in consternation put it on the ground again. It took her some time to make up her mind to see if it was locked. It was not, and as she pushed back the little metal catch the lid flew open and disclosed the underlinen and other garments ready packed for a journey or for flight. After a short inspection Meta closed the case and drew herself up with the expression of one who knows everything but understands nothing. To complete her discoveries, she opened the cupboard.

There all else was lying or hanging, the new dress not excepted. "She has not come to an understanding with any man," Meta decided, "but why did she fight like a wild cat over the inch added to her skirt-length if she means to march off, anyway?" she queried, in utter mystification. "One would almost think she had lost her wits." And again she shook her head. She felt a sharp stab of pain somewhere near her heart as she shut the cupboard door, then cast another inquiring glance at the little suit-case, turned to go with a sense of keen disappointment and left the room full of anxious thought.

Her mood of affectionate emotion had given place to a certain bitterness; with a sad heart she foresaw a renewal of the miserable contest in which both combatants must alike be defeated. She could more or less avert this terrible result—so she told herself—if she without more ado cross-examined Alma on her return, but at present this was an idea she could not entertain for a moment. She was sorely tempted to rebel against the divine ways of Providence, and, secretly trembling, she returned to her own rooms and occupations to await in helpless fear whatever the future might bring. And if the reader asks what there was to prevent anyone so warm-hearted as a rule from carrying out her motherly impulse, the answer must be sought in the fact she was also both a woman and a wife. All day long the notes of yesterday's zither had resounded in her ears. Jealousy is indeed the most justifiable and uncompromising of earthly woes.

As if to give her still more cause for such a feeling, Alma came home in Felgentreu's company. They were talking together, and, unless she was mistaken, they had been laughing before they entered the house. But as soon as Alma came into her presence the girl's expression changed; the painful stubbornness, the uneasiness of conscience accentuated by defiance, the furtive glances, combined with the readiness for flight—all these

reappeared, and she had not accomplished her visit to the Lippkes. Whether, instead of doing so, she had waited for Felgentreu was something Meta did not wish to know, and that Alma had entered the house resolved to speak frankly to her aunt, to make an honest confession and beg for forgiveness, as otherwise she would only bring unhappiness upon the whole house—this was a fact she *could* not know.

Alma sat down by the sideboard and with unseeing eyes watched Meta lay the table. There was such calm, nobility and strength in that dear form, such evidence of a confidence and kindness that invited a return to her care and protection, that Alma was scarcely able to resist the rush of filial affection and longing that suddenly overcame her. She felt an irresistible desire to run to her and fall upon her neck with sobs of contrition. Her cheeks had flushed and her eyes shone with excited emotion when this mysterious being turned round calmly and, full of womanly reserve, looked sadly at Alma with the somewhat cool glance that was habitual to her as she asked her to come to supper.

Saturday began for all three as follows: Meta's looking-glass told her that she was years older. She had passed another sleepless night, tormented, moreover, by worrying doubts and feelings so at variance with each other that they occasionally assumed the intensity of passion. The coming day lay before her already spoilt and ruined, and her only desire—if indeed she could still feel conscious of desire—was for its speedy end. Felgentreu was warm-hearted and frank as ever, even if his eyes betrayed some slight trace of anxiety. He was somewhat upset at being the cause of such secret and bitter strife between two women who were both endowed by nature not only with good, but, in his opinion, even noble qualities as well; yet, since he felt that he had been driven to such a position by some power, not of his own choosing, but

beyond his control, he managed to maintain a considerable measure of calm, unbiased judgment; this he converted into sympathy and understanding of human nature, and thus managed to diffuse a pleasant atmosphere that did much in the way of reconciliation as long as he was there.

Alma appeared with dark shadows below her eyes, and her face seemed to have fallen in round her mouth, giving her a longing look that did but increase her charm. She was on the look-out for plain speaking, for love, for help and Heaven knows what else besides. Moreover, she had received a card from Clara: "Dear little Alma, why haven't you come yet? Are you still ill? We cannot think of such a thing; it would be too much unhappiness all at once. Our mother is very ill; it is pneumonia, and her heart isn't right. She is always asking about you. Will you come to-morrow, Sunday? I will make a cake and have specially good coffee. With dear love, your Clara." Alma read the card and put it away with a sense of great depression. She heard a distant echo of her friend's voice saying: "Will you come to-morrow, Sunday?" and saw her smile of confidence, but then all was lost in the heavy sadness of the present. "Who knows what Sunday may bring?" was her gloomy reflection. "I may be far enough away by then." Meta had brought in the post, so Alma knew she must have seen the card. Let her see it! Let her see the packed suit-case, too; it was all the same to her. After all, everything would come out some time!

It was cleaning-day, which suited her without a doubt. It pleased Meta, too, and the flat had never before had such a thorough scouring and cleaning—not even in this well-ordered house. If, moreover, house-cleaning inevitably results in a certain irritability of feminine tempers on such days, on this occasion the phenomenon was reversed, and feminine temper increased the efficiency of the operations. If they did not take up the floors and tear down the wall-papers, that was the sum-total of their

omissions, for they left nothing else undone that was calculated to cause discomfort and upset, to make work, to turn everything upside down and leave those participating in the work in an overwrought state of utter exhaustion. Whilst Meta was busy sweeping under every piece of furniture, Alma was climbing up to the top of every window and wall. Whilst Meta devoted the strictest attention to every smallest detail, Alma found scope for her activity through the length and breadth of all available space. Taps poured incessantly for hours, brushes scrubbed, soap and soda foamed, wet cloths flapped on the floors and round the edges of furniture, heavy pieces of furniture scraped and groaned as they were pushed over the boards, and buckets rattled. When Emil came home he could find no resting-place for the sole of his foot, and his only dinner was what he called a "dish of wrath." This was, however, a point beyond the range of his understanding of human nature. The consoling angel was under a cloud, scarcely ate, and soon departed from this discomfort to seek a compensation to his liking in a proper slice of roast meat and a glass of beer at some restaurant. Meantime at home the joys of floor-polishing were beginning, and soon the whole house smelt of beeswax, and one room after another experienced with amazement the process of its reduplication—that is, its second appearance in the mirror of its highly-polished floor. The activities of every fly on the ceiling could soon be followed on the parquet flooring below with an exactitude of detail that might well have filled a book, and every chance oversight, wherever it might occur, of the morning cleaners made a merciless reappearance as a reproachful stain on the shining surface. Once Meta said: "The furniture must get a little, too"—a notable event indeed in the prevailing silence of the day, but it was in the floor that she had first seen the necessity of including other articles in the process. In a word, when evening fell, the

whole flat shone with new life, and the two women were reduced to wrecks of their former selves, since it is well known to be an essential part of a proper cleaning-day to despise food and drink, or even to ignore them completely, this total forgetfulness being, of course, better and more praiseworthy than simple contempt, as the latter, when all is said and done, does but prove that thoughts have turned in that direction.

But there was one thing to-day of which neither had ever thought, namely, the proposed visit to the Lippkes. Saturday was no visiting-day, for every family was busy with its cleaning. In this respect, then, the day had been easier than the one before, but in all others evening found them still in the first stages of moral ruin. Alma had kept on thinking: "I will speak out. I must talk to her; we cannot go on like this!" But to approach the mistress of a house—even though she is one of the best of people—when she is in the full exercise of her official duties has ever since the invention of housekeeping proved quite an impossible feat. For a time Alma thought her broom-handle should accidentally break one of the panes in the glass doors of the sideboard cupboard, in the hope of letting loose the waters of strife, but in the end her courage failed her, after all, and she could only drop a glass, which failed to have the desired effect. She was not present when Felgentreu came home, as she had already gone to her bedroom and was busy with hair-washing again. This she followed up with all kinds of other Sunday preparations, so that she quite forgot how time was flying, and did not reappear until half an hour after the usual supper-time, when she came without being called. But even then she found no supper on the way, and Meta sitting with folded hands in front of the window in her usual place on the raised platform. Her aunt looked pale and weary. Alma had surprised her, preoccupied with anything but maternal meditations, and this the girl

instantly perceived with a quick gasp of amazement. But Meta moved at once and remarked in calm and very distant tones: "It is supper-time, I suppose. Emil has gone to the Lehmanns', where we were both invited, but I am too tired for that." So saying, she rose from her chair.

"I'll see to everything," Alma quickly interposed. "Just stay where you are and rest." And she was out of the room in a trice. She could feel the oncoming of some dim sense of fear, called to life by a look in Meta's eyes as from some abysmal depth—a look due to the fact that Meta too had come under the same dread spell and fear. She had hoped that Emil would decline the invitation and stay at home to please her, but he had rushed off as if possessed.

"You knew all along that we were to go out this evening, and I simply cannot fail the Lehmanns." That was true, and yet not true, as was so often the case with the utterances of this remarkable man. The Lehmanns had a pretty grown-up daughter, and in any case he had dressed with special care; he started looking like nothing but a young man, whilst she was left behind as the ageing woman, a fact she realized for the first time to-day. It was this perhaps and not Alma that decided her fate. Here was the explanation of her new-born fear and the source of the shock and terror with which she had inspired her niece. Its result was that after supper Alma too ran away from her. For a quarter of an hour, indeed, her niece had sat as in purgatory in the company of the silent woman with those unfathomable eyes that she scarcely ever raised; then it suddenly occurred to her to call on the Kallmorgens, who had a child ill in bed and lived in the flat immediately below the Felgentreus; in a second she was gone, and did not return much before ten. All this time Meta sat alone with her solitary meditations, her voiceless flowers and her husband's birds.—If things had been as usual between them she would at once have

told Alma to take the flat key. When her niece came back Meta was already in her bedroom and returned the girl's good-night without opening the door, only adding the grave injunction not to begin anything more, as she too must be tired.

Alma obeyed in so far that she really did not take up any fresh task, and she also prepared to go to bed. The day was over and gone, with all the meaningless noises and all the restless haste that men can always make to overpower an inner voice, and with it this sad week of wearing anxiety had come to an end too. Alma looked back at it as at a closed grave, and to her surprise caught sight of the angel of reconciliation sitting at its foot, a presence of which so far she had only had a dim intuitive feeling. The one distinctive feature of this angel is that he is so much more apparent to young than to older eyes; in the realm of childhood he is but one of the forms that are met with in the ordinary course of events, and our first recognition that he is in truth an angel marks the day on which the gates of paradise are closed behind us. Alma sat long listening to the music of the holiday evening, that sounded in her ears like the rustling of the angel's wings. Her thoughts turned involuntarily to former week-ends. It was not many years since scarcely a Saturday had passed in summer when the Felgentreu family had not packed their knapsacks and taken their way to the country. That had become quite a thing of the past—why, Alma could not say. Now months would pass before they went out of the city, and then it was only in the great afternoon rush, when all pleasure or real festive feeling was an utter impossibility. Her heart filled to overflowing with a longing for the lakes and pinewoods and for all the quiet beauty of the Mark,¹ whose length and breadth she had explored all those long summers through under the guidance of her foster-parents. Again

¹ A county in Germany, in which Berlin is situated.

they stood before her eyes, whilst the rustling of the angel wings became more and more perceptible, and it seemed to her that the passing of the years had taken from these two guardians no less than it had given to her, a feeling that came upon her as a wholesome shock, bringing with it a certain foreboding and realization of fate and mortality. The result of this was a decided feeling of youthful liberty in her attitude to her foster-father, whose years were double hers, and a strong sense of inner union and feminine fellow-feeling with the woman who had filled a mother's place to her. Her ears caught fresh echoes of the angel's voice as his golden eyes looked at her in full assurance. "Courage, Alma. She will understand you!"

Her feet were out of bed already, and, after considering the matter for the space of three seconds, she put them to the floor and stood up. Once before in her life she had had such a moment of prophetic insight, when she had succeeded in confessing to Meta that she had broken a window-pane. Something smiled within her soul, whilst her face assumed a thoughtful, almost sad, expression, for as yet she did not quite know what she really wanted. But then she crossed the parlour, put her hand on the latch of the bedroom door, pressed it gently down and slowly opened the door. She listened a moment and then entered. Meta seemed to be asleep, breathing regularly in long, deep breaths. At her side a little lamp was burning, as always when Emil was out late. There was an unwonted look of suffering in Meta's face. The rays of light falling from one side threw into strong relief two deep lines round her mouth. The traces of mental strain had not yet entirely left her face, that still bore the last signs of her physical weariness. But her hand lay relaxed, in the abandonment of sleep, upon her heart, the golden wedding-ring on her finger shining with an almost sacred light. Alma felt tempted to stoop and kiss it, but did not dare. Once again as she looked at the sleeping face she

noticed her eyelids were wet, which was proof positive that she had cried herself to sleep—a fact that upset her niece more than anything she had seen before. She turned her eyes aside in consternation and fear of encroaching on holy ground. Then she noticed on the bedside table a small framed photograph of herself when nearly twelve years old. As a rule the little picture used to hang on the wall beside the sitting-room cupboard; evidently Méta had fetched it to study it again and left it lying on the table. Alma was standing there with a great armful of dahlias which she still remembered, her head a little on one side and her eyes screwed up in the bright sunlight, but on the whole giving the impression of a young creature knowing as yet only life's smile and nothing of its pitfalls and problems, and acquainted with none but the most innocent of its sins. All this came upon her with such unexpected suddenness that sobs rose to her throat. Her eyes, already dim with coming tears, turned once again upon the sleeper's serious face, and for a moment she stood undecided whether to throw herself sobbing on her neck or not. But she could not do it; an unmistakable feeling of reverence held her firmly back. At last she turned away as from a death-bed, with a heavy sigh, and began to go back to her room. Her chest had already begun to heave with her first sobs, and, quite overcome and stumbling a little under the influence of the lesson of that wordless sleep, she knocked against a chair outside the door and stopped short in terror. The regular breathing in the room that she had left ceased and was followed by a moment of dead silence. Then she heard the deep, lonely notes of Méta's voice as she asked, "Is anyone there?" Alma made no movement, but stood as if spell-bound until the regular breathing began once more. "How dreadfully tired she must be," was the thought that flashed through Alma's mind.

With labouring breath and trembling heart she accom-

plished her return journey, and midnight found the beautiful girl lying on her bed pouring out her grief in an unrestrained passion of sobs. But she did not hear Felgentreu come home. Nature in her case, too, would not be denied her rights, and held her in deep, unbroken slumber until the breaking of another day.

CHAPTER XI

THE Felgentreu breakfast-table on Sunday morning gave an impression of special harmony and comfort. The birds kept up a twittering chorus with songs from many a throat, whilst the leader of the choir was amusing himself to-day with deep notes for all the world as if he were gargling. The curtains shone in the whitest of propriety, and one caught a glimpse of the friendly faces of Meta's flowers in the bedroom, that already stood in its usual perfect order. They were azaleas and hyacinths—all of her own growing—and more hyacinths stood between all the windows in their tall, dark-green glasses. The first cineraria, standing on the sideboard, was at the height of its beauty, and covered with white blossoms something like marguerites, except that they were edged with scarlet. The slightly shaded light tended to throw a veil of mystery over everything. Every object in the flat seemed to have a language of its own, with the power of expressing its feelings, and the majority seemed to speak of Meta, to whose care they owed their life and value. Meta was the centre and source of their existence, and there was a certain something in this flat that was more than homely comfort—a spirit, a silent pervading atmosphere of watchful care, a kindly fanaticism of loyalty and reliability which declared its hidden love far more in deed than in words, and always knew far more than it expressed. It was just that secret which has nothing to

lo with comfort, which raises every woman who knows it into the ranks of the uncommon, the unique indeed, and makes of her one whose place can never be filled by others. Some feeling of this filled Felgentreu on this Sunday morning with a sense of warmth that was almost inspiration, and after a short silence, only broken by the clatter of spoons on china, he began to express a thought that had occurred to him meanwhile.

"A text from my schooldays just comes to my mind," he remarked to Meta—"a sure proof, by the way, that all the learning is not entirely useless: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.' Words like those are a possession worth having. A man can enter into it as he would his best room to receive visitors. See here, my dear ones: poor Frau Lippke is fighting for her life. I caught the old man yesterday evening, and he had little good news to tell. The last week was one of strain for us, too. Well now, let there be an end to all ill-feeling, and let's have kindly looks once more. 'Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is,' and so on. To-day you must stay with us, mother. Those are the orders of the day for once. Here life is to be the winner."

The effect of this morning sermon was surprising to begin with, but then followed something in the nature of opposition. Emil, for his part, had relied on such a sudden attack as he had mentioned in the bodega. "Women can always be convinced by facts." Alma, with a deep, heartfelt impulse of hope, listened to the new motto and at once accepted it as an article of faith, since no change as yet had come over her mood of the night before. But as Meta's mood too remained unchanged, and her heart as heavy as when she fell asleep, she did not feel it easy either to hope or believe. Yet she loved the speaker, and therefore sensed his good intentions and the self-conquest of which he had given proof once more. But the real

trouble was that there should be any need of conquest, and that facts should be too strong to allow her to take comfort in words that she could not accept as divine.

"You haven't preached so badly," was her dictum, therefore, accompanied by a somewhat troubled smile. "But my heart is too heavy to-day to find relief in the family circle. You do not know me, for you consider me strong and confident," she said with rare feeling as she looked at Emil sadly with her great grey eyes. "I am so weak and fearful that I often feel terrified at a falling leaf. So let me go my own way. Besides, I too might say, 'If any man love me,' etc., but I have seen too much to tempt God in such fashion. And see to it, Emil, that you do not tempt Him either with your resolves."

"I do not see how I can tempt God," he answered with emotion, yet unable to yield to her. "I am a creature of this world, Meta, and have my own self-respect. May God bless you, my dear wife, but you will some day have to decide one way or another. I have a sadder load to bear than either you or God, and a greater fear to overcome. I have long wanted to tell you this." But even as he spoke his inborn goodness of heart again won the day, his eyes shone with the tender light of dawn, and his voice was full of considerate sympathy. "But that my wife may not feel so all alone at church to-day, do you go with her, my child." As he made his request he glanced at Alma, who started violently at this unexpected address. "I am sure you will do that favour for your aunt and me. A little of God's word won't do you any harm in the hard time of temptation. Now get busy," he urged, "so that you are not behind time and have to hurry to God's house; that looks bad."

As he said these last words he seemed to his wife, who had been closely watching him, to have turned a little paler. She looked inquiringly at Alma, who was by now no less moved. She felt, indeed, like one buried alive,

who suddenly sees his darkness illumined by a ray of light.

"Yes, we'll do that, Aunt Meta," she answered in eager assent. "I am literally longing to join in the singing again. Just get ready without troubling about anything else. I'll wash up and be all dressed, hymn-book in hand, in half an hour."

Meta secretly pulled herself together and breathed more freely, although all she said was: "Agreed, my child." Her eyes turned once more towards her husband in silent inquiry, and although these carnally minded people, with their sudden chopping and changing, were distinctly exhausting, she could not but love them. Something of this love shone in her serious eyes and in the softened expression of her stern lips as she rose from her chair.

"It is a lovely morning, too," she remarked as she looked towards the window, and put her hand with a casual touch on Felgentreu's shoulder—a touch that passed like a prayer through all his being.

Half an hour later the two women left the flat and then the house, whilst Felgentreu watched them both—Alma in her new frock—cross the courtyard together. "I have once more saved the situation," he murmured, with a grave nod of conviction. "But if I have to do it often again I shall take to my heels." And thereupon he lit a cigar and began to walk up and down, lost in a philosophic soliloquy.

On Sunday Frau Felgentreu looked upon all the streets in the city and highways of the world as roads to God, and felt they belonged to her in much the same way as the heir views his father's estate—she gravely suffered those other human beings who passed over them on their way to goals far different from hers, occasionally scanning them with an attention that in no way disturbed her own calmness of spirit. The presence of Alma at her side

with a look of indecision on her face, "how would it be if I went to see Frau Lippke now instead of going to church? There is so little time after service before dinner, and this just struck me. But as you think best, of course."

Meta first turned a searching look upon the young face and then looked meditatively along the row of houses.

"Well, child," she broke silence at last, "I would have liked to feel you sitting at my side to-day, but perhaps Frau Lippke needs you more than does your Maker. Take my kind regards. To-morrow I shall come too. God bless you!"

And with a nod she went on alone. Alma for a little while watched the further course of her long, rhythmical steps until she was lost amongst the people higher up the street. The usual pleasant feeling of respect for her aunt came back to her heart, and with a gentle sigh of relief she turned round and took her way to the Lippkes'. They lived in a long, desolate street, where every house was almost exactly like its neighbour and where no single tree or green leaf relieved the dingy grey of the old walls. The Lippke house was a solitary exception, since a freak of the architect or of some other influential personage had given it a coat of chocolate-brown, a distinction which, far from increasing its charm, only made it seem the ugliest and most desolate house that had ever been built.

Alma's heart beat fast as she approached, and she felt much of her ready courage and confidence melt away at the first sight of its brown paint. The way to the house at the back led through a narrow passage that closely resembled a dark and stuffy funnel, an approach that had always filled Alma with a sense of humiliation and aversion. Now, again, she could not make up her mind at once to enter it in her new dress, with its broad, snow-white collar, and she glanced irresolutely at the house and up and down the street in which she stood. She would have been glad if one of the Lippkes had appeared

and taken her in; but instead of this, her resolve to go to the silent misery up there seemed hard and difficult of accomplishment, besides involving such momentous consequences that she hesitated to carry it out. Yet it is true that she felt great embarrassment at this idea, and saw in her mind's eye a lifelike vision of her future bridegroom. With unseeing eyes she looked down inquiringly at her fresh and dainty garments, and a long glance rested on the one small foot standing in its brown shoe before the other. And now she noticed that her aunt had not made her frock nearly as long as at first appeared. The neck was no higher than was worn by most young girls, and even the sleeve lining was of such thin material that her firm white arms shone through quite plainly enough. That all this should be meant for the grave formality of that long, pale man was really more than she could understand. And to add to her consternation she had a sudden memory of old Lippke, with his eternal bullying and importunity, who was one day to be her father-in-law, and whom she dreaded as she would an unclean beast or anything of the kind that she hated to be near. Quite at a loss, she left the house and went up the street to recover her self-possession. "But it is quite impossible not to go up," she said to herself. "What would Aunt Meta think of you?" Yet even as she said it she realized afresh the impossibility of paying the call, and with an uneasy conscience for the second time crept past the dark hole that formed the entrance to the house.

Dissatisfied with herself, she again passed in review all the reasons why she absolutely must pay this visit. Becoming nervous, she told herself she only had to go and see the invalid, and could come away directly this was done. But she had grown too suspicious really to believe this; her intuition warned her that they would immediately lay hands on her again from every side. She could not explain how it came about, but such dread,

mysterious threats seemed to issue from that invisible sick-bed that, in cowed despair and no longer mistress of herself, she suddenly entered that abominable narrow brick entry. Then she emerged into the cold light of the courtyard on to which the Lippke windows looked from their flat on the left. Again she stopped. Spellbound, she looked fixedly at these pale windows that stared down at her like dead eyes filled with mingled accusation and entreaty and threatened to suck the strong young life out of her veins.

From the houses round the courtyard rose the babel of the usual Sunday noises. Accordions and cheap pianos sent out their rival notes, amidst the general hubbub of songs, gossip, laughter, women's shrieks and children's howls. Alma had an instinctive sense of the great loneliness of those who lay ill amid all this unsympathetic and selfish uproar, and again the feeling caused her pain. She cast another critical glance at her own very satisfactory appearance, and once more looked with aversion at these walls, with their black, cavernous windows and shabby curtains behind them. Then she seemed to see a vision which had something almost seductive about it: in the Lippkes' poor flat, in the midst of all these shabby and in a way degenerate creatures, she suddenly caught sight of herself, standing in the new dress, with her youth and beauty, like a being from another world, a passing visitor only, it is true, yet gracious and condescending, saying a few words, extending her finger-tips, laughing a little, and then departing again unmolested and free in her superiority. Her tongue made a preliminary passage along her upper lip; her heart beat more calmly; her face assumed a look of greater courage. One brown-shod foot advanced, and she was just on the point of going forward when she looked up at the windows again, and thought she caught sight in one of them of Clara's troubled countenance. At the same moment she became conscious

that the church bells had stopped. Until then they had brought her comfort and courage, but now she stood absolutely alone, face to face with what was, in any case, a critical moment. A second more and Clara must recognize her, open the window and call to her. She seemed to feel the sudden clutch of a hand round her throat, and an access of cowardice brought wrathful tears to her eyes. With a feeling of insult, she turned away and looked gloomily for the exit. At this moment a drunken creature behind her fell out of the front door with a tremendous noise into the courtyard, and in a second Alma began to run as if men were after her with open knives. She was still in the dark, walled-in passageway, when she felt sure that the sick woman, with her worn hands and sunken cheeks, was pursuing her and trying to seize her. She thought she distinctly heard Clara calling her name. A cold shudder ran down her back, and she hastened her steps still more. She already had a dim suspicion that she had suffered a severe moral defeat, but meantime she rushed on without a stop, until she had left this street and all the wretched neighbourhood well behind her. She involuntarily took the way by which she had come, not that which led home. "But where do I want to go?" flashed through her brain, and she stopped short, quite at a loss. There passed before her mind's eye a vision of Meta sitting, stately and God-fearing, in her pew, joining the congregation in the singing of the hymn. "There I should find rest and refuge," she thought, with an overwhelming sense of the longing. If she made haste she could get to church just as the congregation finished the hymn and in time for the sermon. But then she remembered a remarkably serious and disapproving look in Meta's face, and further consideration showed her that her aunt could not fail to feel that she had been deceived by her niece. What should she tell her? Her anxiety brought her to another sudden

stop. She turned round and tentatively began to move towards the neighbourhood from which she had fled. After a hundred paces she came to a standstill.

"It is all over," she whispered under her breath, and, quite at a loss, gazed at the street in its Sunday aspect. An expression of deep annoyance lay across her brow. Her cheeks were thin and pale. Even the colour of her eyes had changed to dark grey; they were noticeably larger, too, and their expression that of an experienced woman. "At any rate, it is all over," she whispered again. With bowed head, her eyes fixed on the ground, and resentful lines round the young mouth, she again walked on, and, almost without realizing it, she found herself on her way to her own home and to Felgentreu. Awaking from the confusion of conflicting thoughts, she raised her eyes and saw the door of her home. "Well, here I am," she thought, wrinkling her brows as she entered the building with an oppressive sense of dejection.

Now she had reached and opened the door of the flat. She stepped in, pulled the door to behind her, and in dumb grief went on slowly towards her own room. She sat down on the bed as if waiting for something. Never before had she been so conscious of the distinctive smell belonging to this flat, which was apparent on the very threshold. To-day it was a mixture of cleanliness, perfume from the flowers, fresh cigarette smoke, and the personal atmosphere of the human occupants. There was a special note, too, about the floors as one passed over them—a note of confidence, honesty and strict order. It was filled with a very white, calm light, only slightly modified by the net and muslin curtains that hung, spotless as ever, in front of every window. In addition to all this, it radiated a certain dry warmth, comfortable to feel and giving a pleasant touch to everything. All these circles and figures on the wallpapers, the flowers in the carpets, the atmosphere of learning in every corner, the life in

the pictures on the walls, even the Sabbath stillness of the rooms—all these were the expression of the soul of those who dwelt there, and yet at the same time had an individual life of their own as well. The pieces of furniture which Alma remembered in the other rooms seemed like her brothers and sisters, whilst the cooking utensils in the kitchen were almost like children. Her own room resembled a garment that had grown with her growth, and in which she could shelter from the raging of life's storms, and without which she would be at their mercy, naked and defenceless. She could not possibly fail to notice how persistently her heart clung to every object, even the veriest trifle, belonging to the flat. "In spite of all, then, you will go?" a voice seemed to inquire. "Well, then, set about it; change your dress." She listened, yet did not hear. For a time she stood stroking her dress with hands cold with emotion. "So far all is right," she thought. Her blood no longer seemed to course so freely through her veins, but glowed in a heat she could not explain. Her one and only perceptible sensation now was the scent of his cigarettes and the sound of his movements in the parlour, where he was getting ready to go out. He did not seem to have heard her enter the flat.

Felgentreu had at last felt too lonely in the empty flat. He had provided his birds with seed and water, and then, with the idea of a morning drink, he had passed through the parlour with his usual decisive, manly tread to the vestibule, where he took up his stick. As he turned to the flat door, he noticed through the kitchen Alma's open door, and, looking up, he met Alma's dark eyes fixed upon him. He was wearing his everyday blue suit, a red tie, and a soft, broad-brimmed hat; in his hand he held the heavy walking-stick with the silver handle that Meta had given him. A slight quiver passed through him as he caught sight of the girlish form. For a few seconds he stood to watch. At last he began to move

slowly in her direction. As he crossed the kitchen he unconsciously threw away his cigarette, which fell on the hearth and went on gently smouldering and smoking. He entered her room, laid his stick on her table—this, too, unconsciously—and, sitting down on the bed at her side, took her hands in his.

"There, you see, you didn't get to church after all," he remarked, looking her full in the face. "What is not to happen never does. As I saw you start off at Meta's side, in your little new frock, I thought, 'God go with you in your youthful beauty,' and now all of a sudden I see you seated here." His eyes flashed. "As surely as I love you, you great lovely child, so surely will I never let you escape from my hands again, come what may. See now how I have longed for you and would never own to it. At night I have kissed my pillow secretly, and no sooner did I hear Meta safely asleep than I threw myself on my face and wept tears of love and longing for your dear self."

With all the intensity of passion he drew her to him, bent back her pale face and kissed her. Not a sound did she utter, only gazed intently at him with her clear grey eyes, darkened to-day under the influence of deep emotion. His words surrounded her like the rush of rain intermingled with a blackbird's notes. They made her almost wild and ruthless, and all sounded overpoweringly sweet in its infatuation. The touch of his hands so confused and overwhelmed her that her heart beat wildly with a sense of powerlessness. Her face grew even paler, and the gravity of her expression was now tinged with a threatening pain. Soon she began to groan and lament under his kisses, growing hot and heavy as she lay in his arms. Clinging closer and closer to him, she began to stammer childlike petitions that roused him to a passion of tenderness, although he could not spare her, mainly perhaps because she did not really want to be spared.

At last all their world changed to a still grotto, where they lay midst fiery flame in the green depths of still water, and two more lovers were given to the world.

But through it all Alma had never entirely forgotten Meta. No sooner had she regained some little control of mind and body than she hastily pushed Emil away and made an effort to get up. But the next moment she repented and drew him back, and in the blissful weakness that followed she renewed her stammering appeals for mercy. She bit him, scratched him like a cat, and between these attacks, utterly overcome by a mad passion of tenderness, she would stroke and caress his fair head.

"Leave me!" she groaned in stammering words. "Leave me! You are my all! Only go now. Ah! God in heaven! your wife will be here directly!" Never before had she spoken of Meta under this name, and now she did so quite unconsciously. By degrees she recovered sufficient strength to free herself from his embrace. For a short time she continued to sit beside him with a shy smile on her lips, in her confusion pushing back her hair from her brow whilst he offered her the homage of his deep devotion. To this she responded with trembling timidity, whilst a palpitating anxiety took possession of her, making her colour come and go, and threatening to rob her of all the self-possession she had just regained. When at last he saw that she could scarcely listen for excitement, he gave in and prepared to leave her for the present.

"I ought really not to do it," he said, shaking his head with an expression of disapproval. "But I must obey your fears. After all, what does a little parting matter? We are now one—one in soul and body; never forget that, Alma, my darling love. I shall go now and look for our nest. This afternoon or to-morrow I shall take your hand and lead you to it, and then, in the eyes of God and Nature, we shall form a united pair that can never more

be parted. Be proud and full of the sacred power of love, I entreat you. I am, too. But would you not rather come with me now? I feel almost afraid to go away without you—as if I were letting my happiness slip from my grasp.”

But she shook her head quickly, and urged him to the door. “No, no! go now!” she said, looking at him with a haggard smile. She drew back timidly from any fresh embrace, and even denied him one last kiss. “Not again! not again!” she begged with eyes of terror. And as though escaping from unseen pursuers, she again urged his departure.

At last he went. She firmly closed the door behind him as if she was afraid that he might return once more. For a few moments she leant her head against the door-post, breathing deeply in her effort to regain her self-control. Tears poured down her face, almost without her knowledge. In the flood of longing for him and his caresses that overwhelmed her a bitter cry arose from body and soul alike to run after him and never to leave him more.

When the sound of his footsteps had died away, she returned with a cold shudder of loneliness to her room, bolted the door, and began in all haste to tear off her frock. She rearranged the bed and spread out her dress upon it with the greatest care. Then she put on a white blouse. She had already taken up the blue skirt when she bethought herself that, as a wage-earner, a young woman can never have too many blouses, so drew on another over the first. But she did not put on two skirts, although that might have been justified by the very same argument; it would, however, have increased her hip measurement, a thing of which she had a mortal loathing. Then she put on her simple everyday hat. She was in too great a hurry to change her shoes.

But just as she was in the act of picking up her suit-

case a key turned in the outer lock and someone came in immediately afterwards—Meta, as she knew by the quiet, deep note on which she cleared her throat. The shock made her so weak with fright that she had to sit down on the bed. "All is lost," was her first thought, and, with a face as pale as death, she listened intently to her aunt's movements. She put her umbrella in the stand—"she always has an umbrella, of course," Alma thought in torture—and then moved slowly to the sitting-room. With every nerve quivering, the girl strained her ears to listen. When she heard her steps in the bedroom and noticed that her aunt was busy changing her dress, she drew a passionate sigh of relief. A moment more and she seized the little suit-case once again. Without a sound she opened her door, crossed the threshold, and shut it in the same noiseless fashion. She then crossed the vestibule with quick, almost inaudible steps, unfastened the door, and a second after stood outside, her heart hammering against her side. She only drew the door gently to, without latching it, lest Meta should be attracted by the noise. From the house door she cast a searching glance up and down the street, and then turned to the right. At the corner she took an eastward-bound tram, and in another quarter of an hour she was swallowed up in the mighty surge of the great city's Sunday traffic.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Felgentreu came back he did not find Alma in the flat. In answer to his inquiry for her, Meta was telling him what she knew, when he cut her short.

"Why, she was back here long since!" he exclaimed. "Have you looked in her room?" He was already on his way to knock at her door. "Alma!" he cried. "Alma,

child, are you in? It's me, Emil." When there was no sign of movement, he put his hand on the latch and opened the door. The room was empty. The crushed tartan frock lay spread out carefully on the bed. "She's gone!" he said, with a look of utter consternation. "I had a presentiment of it," he went on, as though in confirmation. "It would scarcely let me leave the house!" And with deep emotion he added: "Now, mother, I shall think of nothing else but how to get the child back. Weren't you uneasy, then, when she was so long away?"

She did not answer at once, as her eyes looked slowly through the room and then at his face, so moved by passion.

"I expect you know something of which I am ignorant," she answered a little hesitatingly, "or else I should have been surprised as well." But lest a wall of silence should now keep them apart, she went on a little more quickly: "I told you that she left me to visit Frau Lippke. You haven't heard from there. So I supposed either that things were going badly or that Alma was coming to an understanding with the Lippkes. Besides——" But instead of going on to the main reason, she stopped short and turned her eyes aside irresolutely.

Whilst she was speaking he had kept his eyes half-turned from the empty room and fixed on her.

"Now, just listen what revelations are being made!" he said in wide-eyed amazement, and conscious himself of the changed look in his eyes. "To make things easier for us all, I let her go to church, and instead of that you send her on some match-making errand to the Lippkes. I can do nothing for you, mother. I am frightfully sorry for you, but yours is a firm character and you have your religion. The child is but a reed in the wind, and we two worldlings have nothing but ourselves. Ask your God why that had to be. Now I am going to look for Alma, and I shall not come back till I have found her."

And with these words he went. His wife stood motionless in the kitchen, in a long effort to recover her self-possession. Later her limbs began to tremble and she was forced to sit down. There she sat as in a dream, hearing nothing but the sound of the door shutting after him, seeing nothing but Alma's empty room, and feeling nothing but an unwonted loneliness of heart. "I have let one of God's souls pass by His church, and now I am punished," she thought. In an almost superstitious immobility which emphasized the likeness between herself and her niece, she let the minutes grow in number as they passed over her head; she was afraid lest even the slightest movement—be it but the raising of her eyes—should shake down the tottering edifice of her world and bury her beneath its ruins. Her one endeavour—so intent that it was almost pain—was "to keep from destruction, to touch nothing, to say not a word." Perhaps she had made a mistake, and perhaps her God wished to give her a real shock. But perhaps, too, He wished to try the magnitude of her faith and the reality of her trust in Him, to see if she was worthy to have her happiness continued, and if she could still be trusted with the fate of such a bold and restless husband. After an hour she folded her hands with deep emotion and began a whispered prayer. "Give me grief," she pleaded, "give me sickness, poverty, what Thou wilt—only bring back to me unharmed the souls that have been entrusted to my care. Or how can I appear before Thee on the day of judgment? Pour down Thy light upon me. Deliver me from vain hopes and desires. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

In the true Protestant spirit she was trying to find refuge from outer turmoil and distress in inner meditation. She believed that in her conscience lay a never-failing source of renewed personal life and a miraculous, irresistible power that nothing could withstand, provided

only that her faith did not fail. Wherever she turned she was upheld by those Protestant principles that made the individual the centre of life, and unswervingly maintained that individual judgment of right and wrong was the one light to be followed in daily thought and action. Her strength of character and natural imperturbability of attitude happily preserved her from spiritual pride and that barrenness of spirit which in weaker natures is the inevitable result of such a moral conception. And no less true Prussian in spirit, she got up at last to continue her preparations for dinner as though under no shadow of impending catastrophe.

When, therefore, Felgentreu returned late in the afternoon without Alma and half-starved and worn-out with his search, which, in spite of all inquiries, had resulted in nothing at all, not even in the faintest clues, the atmosphere was not at all what he had expected. He had himself lost all his bearings, both mental and moral, and faced his wife prepared for explanations of the most devastating nature.

On his way home he had most carefully and definitely thought out what he would say to her and the consequences that would inevitably follow. No sooner had he given his report than, carried away by a fresh flood of unmitigated passion, he began to talk as he wandered about restlessly—for in spirit he was still continuing his search.

Without any attempt at disguise, he spoke of their love and the indestructible nature of the bond that united them. He was averse to any iron restraint of his freedom of action, and fixed principles of every kind seemed to him both painful and unnatural. He loyally offered his wife the full measure of fellow-feeling and sympathy which he felt was her due for the loss of present and future happiness that must result from his action, but he never swerved from the one vital point. Nothing could shake his conviction that Alma would return, and that

he could then "lead her to his home." For the present he would go there alone, and do so this very day.

Meta meanwhile had been silently dishing his dinner; quite unconsciously he had, whilst talking, wandered to and fro between kitchen and dining-room as he followed her every movement. Now she told him to sit down, took a seat herself, helped him to soup, and took out the needlework that had suffered such a long interruption. The quiet of these calm feminine tactics began to upset and annoy him. With pale cheeks he yielded to her repeated invitations and took up his spoon, since he was really famished, almost fainting indeed. Meta still said nothing, but in no way gave the impression that her silence was caused by overpowering grief, or that her energy was but the outcry of that bitterness of spirit which, in his opinion, would not only have been natural but no more than right under a loss such as hers. At last, with utter want of understanding, he felt that her self-control far exceeded his boldest expectations. Then he began to fancy that she might long since have seen it all coming and had thought out the whole business in silence. Quite overcome by such self-control in mortal woman, he suddenly put down his spoon, got up, and once more began his excited tramping up and down.

"I have never quite understood you." His voice betrayed his mingled admiration and regret. "Are you, then, just an ordinary human being? Why don't you rage or howl now, or make a scene fit to raise the dead? This moral inequality is also a disadvantage, dear Meta. That it hasn't long since brought me to utter grief is entirely due to your care and warm affection. Yet you have never been quite easy about me. You had to hang up horseshoes everywhere as a safeguard against my unreliability and our temperamental differences. That has been your life with me. Now, in a moment, you are free of it all!" With half-unseeing eyes he sat down on

another chair, staring straight in front of him, until, in a sudden fit of uncontrollable sobs, he dropped forward on to the table. His wife had stopped working, and, after gravely passing her needle to and fro across the back of her hand, that was still almost as smooth as in early youth, she too broke silence.

"Now, Emil, you have had it all out, I expect." Her words were slow and hesitating. "You have excited yourself and eaten nothing, and rushed about the city, Heaven knows where. You need not be frightened of me. I won't influence your action in any way. We will discuss as friends what must be done. God will lead us on the right path. And now come and get on with your soup—or leave it, rather; it will be cold by now. I will fetch the meat and vegetables."

She did so, going backwards and forwards and urging him to sit down again, in a way that but increased his surprise. Yet, a little more composed, he got up and took his place at the table again. For a time he continued his meal in silence, lost in his thoughts and reflections. At last, however, he began once more.

"It always sounds right and friendly when you talk," he said, putting down his fork again. "But see here, you say you will not influence me. Very well, then, if I stay in the house there are two things possible: either you will despise me or I you. You have but a poor opinion of me! Meta, it is the bitter truth that I mean to leave your bed and board. You are a little slow in understanding that. Perhaps in ten years you have grown too used to look upon me as your young husband."

His flaming eyes looked straight into hers, and she firmly closed her lips before answering.

"How will you manage, then, about settling in?" she asked at last, instead of giving any direct reply. "I suppose you want to have a flat to yourselves? Have you any settled plan?"

"Any settled plan?" he repeated in astonishment. "As far as I know I have savings. What other plan do I need?"

"You mean the 15,000 marks?" He gave a glance of affirmation, and again she hesitated. "Then you have forgotten what we agreed about that. Have I equal control over this money or have I not? Tell me that, Emil."

"Ah! that's it!" he snapped. "Yes, yes, you are perfectly right again," he went on meditatively. "I gave it you." He scanned her with a scrutinizing glance. "You are growing human by degrees. All right, you have the power and choose to use it. But not over me, Meta, only over the money. Is there something else, perhaps?"

"No, nothing more," she answered, with a little sigh of indignation. At first she seemed inclined to break off this conversation, which was quickly growing bitter, but after a short pause she conquered herself and began again. "I was not conscious of using any power," she said, speaking softly to hide the trembling of her voice. "I only wish to show you what I can and what I cannot do. A God-given responsibility I cannot relinquish, unless I know definitely and clearly into whose hands it is to pass."

"If you want to teach me how to fear you, go on talking like that," he declared, with a feeling of secret wrath. "What a head, wife! What a Lutheran, Prussian brain you've got! The responsibility has been laid upon you by God, so all else may bend and break. . . . Well, well, you have God Almighty and the money, and the flat is yours as well. See to it that with all this you don't by some oversight lose my friendly understanding and sympathy. I suppose you do not know how much affection I still have for you?"

A fleeting shade of distress passed over her grey eyes, and her mouth quivered a little.

"Then show it by trusting in me and staying here until Alma is found again," she proposed in a low voice.

"No, no!" He shook his head wilfully. "I must set up my own wireless station, where, undisturbed by outside influences, I can get into direct communication with her."

"We live in a well-ordered State," she reminded him a little scornfully. "In a few days I will go to the police inquiry office and get her new address for sixpence. Then you can go to it and fetch her; you don't need any wireless for that."

"One day you'll know what despair means, with your well-ordered State!" he flared up angrily. "When you are so up to the eyes in misery that you don't know how to go on living, then you can run off to the police and get sixpence-worth of information. There, you see"—he shrugged his shoulders—"how well your plan of my stopping here answers from the very first. But you show your hand much too plainly—driving one of us out of the house and trying to keep the other well behind its doors."

"I have driven nobody out of the house!"—and now her voice was angry too. "I have known for the past two days that she meant to go; her suit-case lay ready packed in her bedroom. But that is all. To-day she was quite her usual self with me. It was her own wish to go to the Lippkes. What happened to her afterwards I cannot know. You were at home. If anyone drove her out at last, we must ask you, since you were the last to speak to her."

"You knew that she was meaning to go!" he exclaimed, now quite beside himself. "Tell me how you manage to bear all your responsibility!" And, casting aside all attempt at self-control, he burst out: "I don't know either what happened in between. It must be a terrible thing to go to church with you. It's not for nothing I have refused to do it all these years. Meta, I'll have your portrait in oils, a marble statue made of you to give you every honour that can be shown to any

human being—but not another hour will I live with you. Good heavens! to have known that and yet let it happen!”

He had sprung up from his chair and was walking excitedly up and down the room. Meta was looking sadly straight in front of her, her pale face telling its own tale of suffering and overstrain.

“Then we no longer understand each other,” she answered at length. “Well, it must be as God wills. But, Emil, you will be quite able to understand what I am now going to say. As soon as you cross this threshold to leave me in such fear and sorrow, after all my loyalty and devotion of the last ten years, that very same hour I too will close the door behind me just as you mean to do. Possibly”—and again her voice held a touch of scorn—“possibly you fancied that I should keep on living here, quite content with the rôle of grass-widow. What do you think of doing with your birds? Ah, Emil, my dear, what a misery it is now and again, with the fancies you get into your head! Your meal is all cold now. I will make the coffee at once. I don’t suppose you will want to start this minute. And I must pack your box properly, too. We have to show your fresh people that you’ve been well looked after. Now, good-bye for the present.”

She seemed quite calm and collected again. Whilst he stood at the window with his back turned to her and struggling with his emotional distress and mental conflict, Meta cleared the table and carried out the plates and dishes. Then he was left for a good half-hour alone with his birds and the curtains, but they simply did not exist for him now. Instead, the muffled sound of Meta’s activity in the kitchen sounded like a further continuation of her words, and with every passing moment the significance of what she had said seemed to him more and more sinister. By degrees he had come to look upon her as an edifying phenomenon made up of piety, firmness and other superhuman virtues—indeed, in his mental con-

ception of her he had so zealously beautified and idealized her image that at last it might well have served as a domestic altar-piece. Suddenly she seemed to him, in addition to all this, still in other respects a human being capable of making unexpected resolutions and of changing her position, open to emotional inspirations, and willing to use desperate remedies. All this honestly dismayed him, and tended to pull him up in his first impetuosity and bold course of action. In a word, he had wanted to start out on the search for his beloved, and met—his old wife. The great billows of emotion subsided into a strong onward movement and a restless backward pull. The flashing, moving lights faded away. Anger, bitterness, fear and despairing love still remained, but these were now joined by other emotions with which he found it less easy to deal, and their combined effect was a general heaviness of heart and mental depression, which henceforth were to accompany him for much of his remaining journey.

In this fresh state of mind he sat down to the coffee-table, though scarcely aware that he had done so. Afterwards he paced up and down the room, smoking as he walked, whilst his wife sat on the raised step by the window with the Sunday paper that she could not read. Suddenly he seized his hat, and with the remark, "I must be amongst other people for an hour or so," he left the flat.

A little after the appointed time he was back, however. He had meantime countermanded the room he had taken and paid the customary compensation. The remaining hours dragged on heavily; but few words were interchanged, and those only on indifferent subjects. He passed the night encamped on the couch, an arrangement in which he afterwards persisted; it was the least he could do to show that in this flat he was now no more than a

CHAPTER XIII

ON Thursday morning a black-edged letter came by post announcing the death of the dearly beloved wife and mother, Augustine Lippke, and begging for sympathy with the survivors in their great loss. Emil and Meta agreed that they would send a wreath, and Felgentreu, who was much depressed, decided to go to the funeral, which was fixed for the following Saturday. Meta gave the wreath, and her husband got leave of absence from the works for that day. His appearance was distinctly impressive when he entered the house of mourning in his black tail-coat, top-hat and kid gloves. In the middle of the room, where the table had been pushed to one side, lay the dead woman in solemn and pathetic state. The thin, waxen hands were folded over a few white carnations, and yellow roses lay by her cheeks. These were from Clara, and at that season of the year must have taken a fairly large slice of her pocket-money. There was nothing else worthy of note, except that poor Stina perhaps appeared even more inconspicuous in death than in life—indeed, she seemed to be literally hiding away in this last safe refuge. One had, so to speak, to look very carefully to recognize what it was that was lying there in its last sleep. She lay in a white coffin with paper lace that Clara had made her father order; he had wanted a brown one, as more suitable for a married woman, whilst Julius had inclined to black as more in harmony with his own state of mind. No more need be said of the matter.

When Felgentreu, in his mourning suit, gravely entered, hat in hand, Clara, who was standing sadly by the coffin, sobbed aloud. She went to meet him, almost staggering under the weight of her grief and fatigue after all the lonely nights spent in tears, and exclaimed in strangely

agitated tones, at the same time pointing to the door with one hand, in which she grasped a wet handkerchief: "Why, then, doesn't Alma come even now?"

Felgentreu greeted her without replying to this question. Then he offered his hand to the old man, who, gazing at him coldly and in the proud consciousness of his importance as a bereaved widower, acknowledged his presence with solemn and distant reserve. He listened with tightly shut lips to his condolences, his only acknowledgment being a movement as if he wanted to spit, but bethought himself at the last moment and refrained. Not that he had abstained from his quid to-day; as that was inside and not visible to the public eye, he felt it could not offend against the proprieties. Emil also expressed his sympathy to Julius, who, with a crape band round his arm, was standing beside Clara. The young man, whose eyelids were especially red to-day, responded with a stiff, jerky bow and whispered something or other, whilst a polite but distressed smile passed over his pale features. He then drew himself up again and fixed his eyes once more on the ends of his moustache. A few other sympathizers arrived with wreaths. The coffin was then screwed down, and all the company stood in dumb grief or boredom, awaiting the arrival of the clergyman. Outside the door, in the vestibule, the bearers were leaning against the wall, except one who had taken a seat in the kitchen, all waiting to carry out their duty. The hearse was drawn up outside the door. It belonged to the variety adorned with angels' heads and a cross with silver ornamentations on its roof. The horses had tassels on their trappings. In addition to the hearse, four cabs had driven up for the guests; a special one had been sent to fetch the parson.

Felgentreu had time to look round about him, as far as propriety allowed. The bedroom door was open, and the basket he had sent was still standing on the table inside;

the oranges and other fruit seemed still untouched, but the bottles were plainly all but empty; even of the cognac only a few drops remained. Lippke smelt strongly of alcohol, and again Emil felt an impulse of sympathy with the old man, who had been so severely tried. He struck an observer as being both poverty-stricken and forsaken as he stood there in his ill-fitting mourning suit, green, threadbare and polished by long use, and holding in his hand a shaggy old top-hat. His morose and wrinkled face, typical of a dissatisfied and neglected subordinate official, with its simulated look of honour, was not rendered more attractive by the covetous ambition which he took such pains to conceal, but which had, under suppression, grown into a veritable vice, nor by the whitish-yellow ferocious beard so badly clipped that the ends looked as if they had been gnawed by mice, and the thin, scanty allowance of hair on his old head. Felgentreu had never seen him with such a festive brush-up as to-day; the bald head, with a few wet hairs carefully combed over it, seemed almost immodest in its nakedness. At last the parson arrived, and all further proceedings were now marked by business-like alacrity. The address, like the poor dead woman, was quite insignificant; the amount of religion and ecclesiastical respect expended was nicely apportioned, with due regard to the lowly position occupied by the deceased in her lifetime. After the last amen, the men came in, filling everyone present with a sense of gloom and terror. Clara burst into uncontrollable sobs; she felt unspeakably lonely, with no Alma there to whom she could have poured out all her grief. She dared not approach Felgentreu, since he was in no way related to them, and had, moreover, to-day such a distant, unfamiliar look about him. The coffin was lifted and carried out. The turns on the staircase proved a difficulty. Sometimes the coffin lay on its side, sometimes with the head uppermost and then the foot. Only those who

have seen Berlin bearers at work can understand what Clara and Julius had to endure at the sight. After all the care and loving effort they had expended on their dead mother's last resting-place, they were forced to stand by and picture her in this journey, tossed first to one side, then to the other, and the thought of her probable condition when she should at last reach her grave almost brought Clara's heart to a standstill in her feeling of impotent rage. The old man, too, viewed the transport with a critical eye, but he was better able to endure the sight. He decided with a certain satisfaction that the white coffin certainly looked nice, although he still stuck to his opinion that a brown one would have been more fitting for one who in life had achieved the position of a citizen's wife. In any case, it would be all the same to her. Julius had his eyes full of tears and a continual quiver at the corners of his mouth; he was so oppressed by his sense of loss that he could scarcely spare a thought as to the import of Felgentreu's presence there, as far as he himself was concerned. At last the coffin, with its poor tossed burden, was placed in the hearse. The pastor crept into his cab, the grief-stricken relatives into theirs, the guests distributed themselves amongst the others, and the procession started at a walking pace to the cemetery, which was reached in about three-quarters of an hour. It was then already growing dark, as the day had been overcast, and the pastor made the proceedings as short as possible. The coffin swayed and knocked against the sides of the grave until it finally disappeared from view. Wellnigh innumerable rows of freshly filled-in graves watched the proceedings in a cold and terrible indifference. It was spring, the season of death's chief harvest in all great cities. Many graves were heaped high with mountains of bright flowers, streamers and palms, whilst others gazed at the fleeting grey clouds in poverty-stricken nakedness. The pastor asked for silent prayer, gazed for

a second into the cap he held before his face, shook hands with the family, and hurried back to his cab. The few guests also took leave of the relatives, eager to turn their backs on this God-forsaken field of the dead.

When Felgentreu, as the last visitor, shook hands with Clara, she raised her tear-stained face and begged him to come back with them to the flat; she was going to make coffee for them all, and they could get some cake from the baker's on the way home. Julius appeared to confirm this invitation by a look of solemn interrogation in his red-rimmed eyes. The old man maintained a morose silence and seemed to have heard nothing. All through the homeward journey he acted as if he looked upon Felgentreu as a troublesome, uninvited hanger-on, whom he would be glad to be rid of. All four sat in dead silence, closely packed together in the rattling cab, their shoulders and knees continually bumping against one another. Each had food enough both for thought and emotion. But closely as they were packed in the shaky conveyance, each felt his own loneliness was incomparably greater than that of his companions—a loneliness which none but himself could gauge or understand.

The light of the street lamps began to shine through the windows as they reached a more frequented quarter of the city. Until then the cab had rolled through unbroken rows of unfamiliar, dirty, gloomy houses that stared blankly at one another, day and night, in unsympathetic hatred, for when evening came the half-blind, suspicious eyes barely closed, but sent mutually spiteful glances through the chinks, which in the morning poured forth all the stuffiness of the night and looked a day older, uglier and more common. Now, too, they peered curiously into the cab, out of which a shiny top-hat appeared now and again, and where the pale, grief-stricken cheek of a young motherless girl in black was visible beside the door. Felgentreu could not help looking

at her. She was now tired and limp with exhaustion. Her blue eyes looked out of the window in thoughtful gravity and her hands were patiently folded over the handkerchief in her lap.

At last the cab stopped before the bakery, which Clara pointed out. She got out quickly and bought something for coffee. Then she came back to the three men, and they finished the journey home. The entrance and general staircase still smelt of the funeral, and in the flat itself they were greeted by a very marked odour of death—a mixture of ammonia and fading flowers. In the parlour the chairs were still standing as they had supported the coffin. Each of the four mourners, as they entered, involuntarily measured with their eyes the distance between these chairs, with its suggestion of what had so lately occupied that space. Clara lit up—there was gas in the flat—with some help from Julius quickly pushed the table back into the middle of the room, placed the chairs round it, begged Felgentreu to sit down whilst waiting, and, without taking off her hat, put on the water to boil in the kitchen. Then she hung her black crape hat in the vestibule beside the men's, shut the open windows, which none of the other three had ever dreamt of closing, and began to lay the table. No sooner was the white cloth on than the room began to lose its death-like air, which entirely disappeared when the cups and plates were put on the table.

Felgentreu began to inquire as to the last days of Frau Stina, and Clara answered his questions as she moved to and from the kitchen. Julius, too, put in a few remarks from his place by the window, where he was wearily gazing into the grey dusk outside. The old man, with his pipe in his mouth, was silently marching up and down on the other side of the table. He had taken off his black coat and was now in his shirt-sleeves, with a cap on his head. From time to time he scanned Felgentreu with a

cold and spiteful look in his eyes. The others began a halting conversation in which it was evident that all the speakers' thoughts were far distant. Moreover, Julius addressed himself exclusively to Emil; he still continued to cut his father, only deigning, as opportunity offered, to give him an indirect snub, which at once reduced the old man to silence. Such a reproof to his father, however, never failed to make Julius himself ill at ease and absorbed in a dispirited contemplation of his moustache. Emil also noticed that the young man took advantage of any moment, when he thought he could do so unnoticed, to cast a side-glance at the visitor. With every minute that Felgentreu sat there talking the atmosphere became more and more charged with an evident feeling of silent expectation or excitement that added a new note of constraint and oppression to the funereal melancholy that already existed. But the old man's restless tramping and his smouldering though as yet inaudible wrath, no less than the young man's monosyllabic utterances, in which he had finally taken refuge, and his indifference to all around him as he stood with his pale face turned to the window, came to a sudden end when Clara, with a fresh access of grief, began to tell of her mother's last words. It had been on Wednesday evening that she suddenly awoke from her long unconscious stupor. At first she seemed to have difficulty in understanding what had happened to her. Then she began to cast uneasy glances round the room. She made a great effort to pass her thin, trembling hands over her eyes, as she so often did in her last days in an attempt to clear her sight, but she no longer had the strength to do it.

"Why—does—Fräulein—Alma—still—not—come?" she groaned at last, looking round as if she really must be answered. "What—wrong—have—we—done—her?" A little later the death agony began, and lasted till after midnight. At this recital, Julius, from his chair in the

corner, uttered such a strange howling sound that Felgentreu looked at him in amazement; he was cowering there, bowed down with his head on his hands, unable to cry, in spite of his apparently agonizing efforts to do so. At this moment Lippke stopped his ceaseless tramping and suddenly turned to Felgentreu.

"Your cake upset my wife's stomach! That very same evening she began thinking about death," he remarked. "Your Meta, I expect, put too much self-righteousness into it instead of yeast; all stomachs can't stand that. Such an aristocratic family ought to be a bit more careful with their invitations to coffee!"

"Now, don't begin that again, father," Clara indignantly protested. "Our own cake didn't suit you either last Sunday."

"We'll have the matter cleared up now, or I'll go raving mad," the old man answered in a threatening tone. "I've been an honourable man all my life, and deserve the respect of my family and employers. That I didn't come to the top was the fault of my manly pride. I couldn't go along bowing and scraping, and always had a rough way about me. But you, Julius, are on the path to success; by affection and severity I have guided you to brilliant prospects. To refuse me your confidence now, in my hardest time, is a crying shame. Here's Felgentreu himself—he's had the impertinence to make his appearance at the funeral of our mother, who has silently gone like a great soul into the life beyond because Fräulein Alma had such attacks. It was too much for her tender sense of honour. Now ask him. What about the marriage gift, the 20,000 marks, and the main inheritance, Felgentreu? Let's have truth and honour to-day. In the name of the dear departed!"

He gave himself a resounding thump on the chest. His eyes glistened with feverish suffering. He looked in a terribly bad state, an utter wreck, both physically and

mentally. His blue lips were trembling with excitement, and his yellow, parchment-like face wore such an expression of anger, unworthy ambition and hatred that Emil again felt, and even more keenly, the same troubled sympathy as before. Yet before he could answer Julius interposed.

"Hold your tongue, father!" His voice betrayed the effort he was making at self-control. "You must always be making an upstir. We have carried our dear mother"—again he uttered that strange howl—"to her grave, and Herr Felgentreu has honoured her and us by his presence to-day. That we must clearly understand. I hope, Herr Felgentreu, you will take no notice of what he says. He is growing childish with his 'official honour.'"

"Growing childish, am I, with my official honour?" the old man exclaimed, almost shrieking at the insult. His pipe danced in his fist and he stamped with rage. "Then you're growing into a man, with your science and childish feelings. I'm fifty-nine years old and you eight-and-twenty. Julius, don't use your education against me when it was through my self-denial that you got it. Don't drive your father to despair, for that never fails to bring vengeance, I tell you."

"What deserves vengeance here?" Julius broke in, with some impatience. "You've insulted Herr Felgentreu, and it would only be fitting to beg his pardon. You've also insulted Fräulein Alma in her absence, when she cannot defend herself. That's how you protect our family honour!"

Quite taken aback and confused, the old man took a step towards his son. His knees were trembling under him and his eyes starting out of his head.

"What am I to do?" he asked, in a hoarse, grating voice, as he stared him straight in the face with sorrowful reproach. "Beg pardon, did you say? Up till now I've never allowed any insult to our poor but honourable

family, and am I to begin now in my fifty-ninth year? No, no, I tell you; that's beyond my understanding. The whole world seems to me upside down."

For a few seconds he stood there quite at a loss, with wavering eyes and apparently in some mental struggle, whilst Julius got up again and silently walked over to the window. With a sigh the old man drew his hand across his forehead. Suddenly, however, he turned right round, and with quick, unsteady steps moved towards the bedroom, through which he tottered as though walking in his sleep. He closed the door with the greatest care, and after a short silence the three in the other room heard the pop of a drawn cork, the clatter of glass, followed by a cautious but hasty flow of some liquid. The low sound had something sinister about it that was at once felt by all the listeners. Clara, who all through the conversation, which had been nothing but a series of terrible revelations to her, had sat as if paralysed close to the door, although she had long since heard the water boiling on the other side, looked at Felgentreu in mystified entreaty. Julius nervously nibbled at his finger-nails and struggled to keep his self-control. Felgentreu now turned to him.

"But you are doing your father an injustice, Herr Lippke," he said in a serious tone. "He cannot understand it, either. What he says about the marriage portion, the 20,000 marks and the main legacy is no invention of his own, but what I told him. And it was also my settled purpose in the event of your marrying Alma. The result of Alma's condition—that, of course, is a mere figment of his brain. He began to imagine there was something not right about the business. That same evening I thought to myself: 'Don't let's have any fuss. He'll forget all about it again.' He has not forgotten, however, a proof of some want of consideration and sympathy in our attitude, or else I ought to have

been able to prevent his suspicion. It isn't for him to beg my pardon—I must beg his. And you too, Herr Lippke. He has acted in all good faith; he thought he was maintaining the honour of his family."

As the last words were being uttered Lippke again entered the room. To cover his confusion, he had at once resumed his former tramping. But there was a new firmness in his tread, a fresh access of self-confidence in his bearing. Suddenly he understood what Felgentreu was talking about, and turned round with a jerk.

"Ha! ha! Now, do you hear that?" he called out to Julius. "How's that, now? What about you and your science? His conscience pricks him now he's seen his victim in her grave. But you needn't beg pardon, my dear fellow. You can hand over the marriage portion and the 20,000 marks as well, if Julius will consent to cover your family shame with his good name."

"Do shut your mouth, will you!" Julius burst in with such violence that the old man gazed at him in abject terror. "Your everlasting stupid talk! Aren't you content with driving mother into the grave with it? From that very hour her illness took a fatal turn, Herr Felgentreu." Again his voice broke on that howling note. "Is that to go on still?" he added, with fresh bitterness. "The shameless supposition about Fräulein Alma is just an invention of your own dirty thoughts. Let's have an end of your grand airs, if you please."

He turned away in a fury, leaving the old man apparently in the throes of suffocation. His eyes were darting out of his head as he moved his jaw and opened his mouth without being able to utter a word. At last he recovered sufficient breath to stammer out:

"So I drove thy mother into her grave, did I?" The words rattled and rolled in his throat. "That about Alma is my own invention? Then I can just go and cut my throat!" He began marching up and down again, but

was as unsteady on his feet as if he had drunk half a bottle of brandy at a draught, knocked against the backs of the chairs and the edge of the table, and the helpless way in which he passed his hand round and over his head in the agony of thoughts and feelings for which he could find no words gave a painful impression as of one possessed by some speechless evil. "Perhaps it's my doing, too, that you don't get the girl. Now, our aristocratic friend, what's up with your Alma? Why don't she ever show herself here now? Why didn't she, anyhow, pay a little visit to our mother, who was so fond of her, in her last illness? You'll have brought kind inquiries instead. Out with them! Don't keep us waiting!"

Excitement now brought Clara to her feet as well, so that Felgentreu was the only one left seated. All these revelations and this quarrel about Alma's honour came upon her with such a desolating rush of surprise that Clara did not know which way to turn or what to do. Her head throbbed, her heart seemed ready to stop, and she felt she must scream in her ever-increasing passion of sympathy with Julius. But before she could find any outlet for her emotions a great change passed over Felgentreu. He sighed and his eyes became utterly lifeless. In imagination he distinctly saw Alma's desolate figure passing in her lonely search along the dreary streets of the great city, whilst he did the same here, too. An indescribable feeling of mingled longing, love and grief broke down for the first time for days the dull stupefaction that had overwhelmed him. Under its influence he turned his brown eyes towards the young man.

"This question," he slowly remarked, addressing him instead of his father, "has at the moment no point in it. I am sorry, Herr Lippke, but Alma has not been with us since Sunday. She suddenly disappeared, and at this moment we know nothing about her ourselves."

He stopped in utter discouragement, and his words

were followed by a dead silence. The young man's hand made an involuntary movement to his heart, and he stared at Emil with wide-open eyes and paling cheeks. The old man started up as if shot, and stepped towards him in a threatening attitude. Clara looked at her brother in terrible anxiety, as if prepared to rush to his help.

Meantime Emil continued in a low voice: "She had started off with Meta to church, but on the way she said she would pay a visit to Frau Lippke. Now, in spite of this, she has not been here. I spoke to her afterwards when she returned, almost beside herself with distress, from this expedition. I have searched for a whole day without finding even a trace of her. She has not written either."

"If only she has not done herself a mischief!" Clara said, in a trembling, despairing voice. "She has been so excited latterly. Who knows who has been worrying her? There must be something more behind it all!"

"She has certainly not done herself mischief," Emil replied. "She had her little box ready packed two days before. Mother found that out, but she does not know anything more, either."

"That's just a made-up trick!" old Lippke burst out. "Just you let me speak!" he exclaimed, as he saw his son look up with a frown. "They went off the engagement proposal a fortnight since, that's all it is. We made a bad impression on Frau Felgentreu. So, to put an end to it all without a fuss, they've sent the girl away and say she's run off. That's an old tale!"

"There's no need to answer him, Herr Felgentreu," Julius remarked, with a dry sob and reddening eyelids. And making a great effort at self-control, he said to his father: "You have no doubt forgotten that Herr Felgentreu sent the mother a basket of gifts and that he came here himself last Thursday; and you do not appear to have heard that Fräulein Alma was on her way to pay

us a visit shortly before her disappearance, and that Frau Felgentreu let her go for that purpose."

"Julius is quite right," and Clara's voice had a bitter note about it. "Besides, why should the Felgentreus hide Alma if they had really changed their minds?"

"Have you done, girl?" scornfully queried the old man. "What do both of you think you are talking about and not letting him speak? You can tell your tale now at last, Felgentreu. Where's the wench?"

"I cannot say," Emil said wearily, and again overcome by a fatal feeling of helplessness. "I've told you all I know myself. I am"—he turned to Julius with a lost expression—"I am distressed beyond all words. I have done all that any mortal could, and yet have not been able to prevent anything. I gave her your message, too, Herr Lippke. But she and I and all of us are led by a force of which we know nothing. Perhaps you will now blame me; that I must bear. But one thing you will have recognized. I have no need to use such means as your father ascribes to me. There now, I've hurt you very much, Herr Lippke. But my only choice was either to be quite frank or a soft-spoken hypocrite, and I must stand before you with clean hands."

He had said all this with simple gravity and such a look of candour, in spite of his evident distress of mind, that he forced conviction on his hearers in one way or another. Clara looked at him in amazement, anxious to find words in which to express her overwhelming surprise, and yet was too impressed by the change she saw in Emil to be able to say a word, for, suddenly, she perceived that he was a man indeed. Old Lippke cleared his throat violently, as he saw with some anxiety that his accusation was proved utterly false. Meantime Julius, in a low tone, gave an objective and most appropriate reply. His grave voice bore evidence of deep gratitude for the esteem which Felgentreu had shown him, but none the less

there was a treacherous quiver about the ends of his moustache, he was extraordinarily pale, and looked all at once both shrunken and aged.

"Oh, please, Herr Felgentreu," he said, as the tears he could not restrain poured down his cheeks. "My feelings are of no importance; we must look at the matter objectively. You see"—his voice suddenly betrayed something like secret passion—"you see, my misfortune is to have been suppressed all my youth. Now my whole life is burdened by the moral fault which I have brought upon myself by this eternal pretence; then how could I have any attraction for such a fresh young being as Fräulein Alma? She will always remain the only woman I have ever loved. But I thank you, Herr Felgentreu, for—having done me honour by——"

Clara had shock after shock. Now her heart swelled with a mixture of sympathy for her brother and his misfortune, which she suddenly realized for the first time; for Alma, who had felt driven to such action; and for Felgentreu, whose manly sorrow to-day made such an appeal to her heart that she could not decide whom she pitied most. But the old man no longer looked merely in the last stages of suffocation, but like a corpse of several days' standing.

With a face that was almost blue in its pallor, he turned his death-like eyes from one to another in a side-long appeal for help. The entreaty in these glassy eyes was modified by such an expression of menacing cunning that Felgentreu felt physically sick and Julius quickly glanced in another direction. Once the old man looked, as if listening, in the direction of the bedroom door, whilst a grievous craving for some support overshadowed his eyes. In a moment, however, he recollected that he had buried his wife to-day. He spat angrily, and then at once recovered his grasp on the situation, and with it his former trick of headstrong folly.

"Ha! ha! that's the state of affairs, is it? Such a noble company, and such a feeble-minded old fellow amongst them! But old Lippke still keeps his eyes open. Why's there no mention of that attack? Either it was the result of a certain hope, or of an attempt to frustrate it. Now that's succeeded, you don't need any more help from us. Now, then, own up. Is that right, or isn't it?"

Felgentreu got up from his chair wearily, though still with a certain courtesy; he felt that if he stayed any longer he would not be able to resist his desire to fall upon the old man and murder him, and with a sigh he turned to go.

"As you will," he said in uncertain accents, with his back already half-turned. "And in a way, perhaps, it is something like that. Here everything is so rotten——"

He stopped sadly, and again silence followed. No one stirred—only Julius's heart beat passionately and the water for the coffee boiled and bubbled furiously in the kitchen. Old Lippke stepped up to Felgentreu, and the moment after spat out a long brown stream that hit his trousers-leg. "There, you cut-throat!" he said, looking him up and down with unsteady eyes. Then, without warning, he burst into a huge guffaw, intended to hide his terror at what he had done, his dread of consequences and crushing sense of fresh defeat. His eyes still glittered with mad hatred, and he could barely stand for the unendurable, weak trembling of his limbs. But his laughter grew louder and more shrill, whilst Felgentreu bade farewell to Julius, who was incapable of speech and could only respond with his usual jerky bow. Wringing her hands in despair, Clara ran in front of him to the kitchen, and whilst he was taking down his top-hat and stick from the coat-rail, wiped with a damp duster her father's spittle from Felgentreu's trousers, at the same time unconsciously murmuring her shame and contrition. With a comforting gesture, almost as unconscious as her whisper, Felgentreu

passed his hand across her brown hair. Moved by a sudden impulse, she seized, as any outcast might have done, his hand in both of hers and kissed it, then loosed it in terror and stood with cheeks aflame in dumb silence. Emil smiled, and for a moment he seemed to see Alma's loved form and to catch her sweet fragrance; the small, half-dark entrance was filled with a sense of longing and memory irradiated by a transient ray of hope, whilst the inner room still resounded with old Lippke's yells and laughter. Then the front-door closed, and Clara was left alone with her two men once more.

CHAPTER XIV

IN her hasty flight that Sunday, Alma had been carried through the city to its farthest eastern boundaries. She hired a room from some woman, and went on Monday, in her search for work, to reply to all the newspaper notices. She came too late for most places, in others her name was taken down, and evening saw her creep home dead-tired and disappointed with her utter failure. Tuesday she spent in the same discouraging work, and Wednesday passed in a similar way. On Thursday she had to make her first move, as her landlady would not wait any longer, and declined to keep her unless she completed the identification papers required by the police authorities. Alma, however, had some notion in her head of "covering up her tracks," and hoped to manage without filling up these official forms; consequently, being very obstinate, she changed her quarters four more times, until she hit upon an easygoing old woman, who quite understood that circumstances might arise which one would naturally not wish to explain in detail. She had not only a keen scent and a kind heart, but was resourceful and enter-

prising as well, so gave out that Alma was her niece. She commissioned the door-porter to make such declarations as were required, but made no further inquiries, setting herself to await without any special curiosity the further course of events as regarded this prodigal daughter. She was quite sharp-sighted enough to see that there was some lack of coherence in certain essential points, but she had already had experience of such butterflies, who fluttered about for a time in their search for work and independence and then disappeared again, no one knew whither. For the present she was content to know that respectable people who were able to pay stood behind this new guest—the source of her knowledge she did not disclose—and that she had to do with a cared-for and well-brought up child, who evidently possessed the best of principles.

Judged entirely by externals, this good woman did not reach the generally accepted standards of beauty—indeed, she appeared to be made up entirely of such old parts that it was quite impossible to picture her as ever having been young. The most striking feature about her was her long nose, that in form and colour reminded the spectator of a turkey's proboscis. Below this lay a crooked nut-cracker mouth, with a good-humoured twist about the lips, behind which two unusually long yellow teeth clashed against each other in truly warlike fashion. Her forehead resembled one of those great wrinkled foreign sausages—slightly smoky, parchment-like and always somewhat dirty and speckled. Above lay a thin covering of hair, like a poor scanty field of oats growing out of the endless dust and dirt of years. Amid all this glory, her merry blue eyes peeped out like two little cornflowers.

The room that Alma occupied was exactly like its owner, old, shabby, dusty and dirty. It was, to tell the truth, nothing more than a corner that the masons had forgotten to clear away, but the old lady thought to her-

self: "See, now, I'll get something out of this mistake of yours!" And the price that Alma had to pay for it was certainly calculated to give the surveyor restless nights for his carelessness had he but known it. The window was so excellently placed in a sharp corner that it exactly jutted out against the neighbour's kitchen window. No light or sunshine came in from there, but all the smells of that kitchen, as well as of all the others below, came driving up as in a chimney, so that in the evening Alma's room smelt like a restaurant, and not by any means one of the first rank either. In the kitchen opposite an old man was always pottering about in front of the window, so that Alma preferred to renounce the small amount of fresh air that the nightly pause in cooking might have given her, and to spend her free evening hours behind closed and curtained window-panes. And as those opposite could see every detail in her room when the gas was lighted, she went to bed and got up in the same airless privacy.

As long as her hunt for a situation lasted, she got enough fresh air to bear such a mole-like existence after dark without any immediate injury to her health. For a week she was miserable in every possible way—everything tended to increase her feeling of solitude; in the struggle she went through with her home-sickness for the people and things she had left behind, her misery drove her without any discrimination after every place advertised without one being secured. But when her first solitary Sunday was over, she began to think with more method what measures she ought to take to get a well-paid, reputable post, such as she thought she had a right to expect. She passed her second week in such endeavours. She also tried to remember what had been told her before, and endeavoured to act accordingly. It was essential to appear both modest and self-possessed; she must look frank and polite as well as intelligent. Careful dressing

was a sign of a sense of order. In answering questions one must be neither overhasty nor too slow. And then there was another secret: all details must tally with one another, and in her case that was just what they did not do. She found out, it is true, that in the case of young women there were other considerations as well, not strictly speaking connected with business, that might turn the scale, and these she felt might ensure her success, provided she persisted long enough. But even here something was wanting. She was not quite cut out for the profession of a "good saleswoman"; she did not look the part, with her somewhat morose expression. And she entirely lacked all the early training needed for the oldest profession of all. She did not care for dressmaking, and so with all her good looks she could not secure a place in any sphere of work.

Thus the third week began, and the old woman took Alma's first worn-out shoes to the cobbler, although not one of her many journeys had carried her a single step forward on the road to success. She had soon begun to take all her meals with her landlady, for when she had noticed that the old woman coveted this profit, Alma thought it imprudent to turn a deaf ear to her hints. It is true, it cost the spoilt girl a great effort not to starve from disgust at her table, although the price, with the rent of her room, amounted to a good round sum, which was all put down to her account without a single question asked or the very slightest hesitation. To distract her thoughts Alma read a great deal, and almost every evening saw her fetching a fresh volume from the lending library. She would often sit in her chemise on her bed, absorbed in enjoyment of the sickly novels, that portrayed with their magic touch her own experience with darker colours and on an exaggerated scale in the lives of imaginary figures. On the other hand, however, she persistently refused to allow her mind to dwell on any picture of those real

figures belonging to the world she had left. If, in spite of her efforts, they did at any time force themselves within her mental vision, she kept her eyes obstinately averted, in spite of the secret excitement under which lay unfathomable depths of suffering, and waited until they disappeared again.

But when the third week had passed, she slowly made the discovery that, whatever else she might be, she was no longer just a girl. When at last, after a long struggle, she accepted the fact for the first time, she felt as though every hair on her head was standing on end in dismay. Now, she said to herself, an inevitable stage of development had begun, which must exclude her from girlish ranks in appearance as well, and after the lapse of a certain time this change would be apparent to every eye. This thought was so indescribably terrible that her first resolve was to attribute all that had aroused her attention to the effects of her fatigue and hardships, and to go on again as if nothing unusual had happened. She clenched her teeth, assumed her usual self-possession, straightened her back, drew down her shoulders and took great pains, in spite of increasing shabbiness, to give the impression of the capable, self-respecting young woman that she had before been proud to be.

But in the course of another fortnight she saw one stone after another drop out of the stronghold of confidence that she had built in self-defence. The straight back imperceptibly began to stoop a little, and she held herself not quite so well. Her cheeks grew paler and thinner. The growing fear of disgrace robbed her tread of most of its former decision and made it a little wavering. She imagined the ungainliness of her condition was already becoming apparent, and did not dare to meet the eyes of passers-by in the street. Books lost all their charm for her, and instead of reading she spent so many nights and greeted so many days with tears that her wet pillows began

to attract her landlady's attention. Now it might be an open question as to whether the latter suffered from curiosity or not, but one thing was quite certain: if by the help of Providence she had managed to nose out a scent, she did not quickly cease to follow its trail. Nothing astonished her, for her main article of belief was that there was something foul and rotten everywhere, and the only question was when it would "come out." To dig out something, however, was the goal of her most artful tactics, in which she disclosed all the circumspection and persistency at her command. In a week the old woman had wormed out so much from her "room lady" that her secret, though unrevealed and even passionately denied by Alma, hovered between them, somewhat as an avowed perplexity that could no longer be ignored. The old woman, as a born and experienced procuress, cheerfully allowed Alma to give her angry denials, whilst she herself remained sympathetic, and literally possessed by a sort of shameless discretion in her rôle as accomplice.

"Come, Fräulein, there's lots of bigger misfortunes," she consoled her. "To lose both legs would be much worse; after all, we're women, and that's a thing Nature won't let us get away from. Well, then, I like you as you are, and shall like you different too. I always want something to cosset and comfort, you understand, and that's why I let my room to young ladies. If you've no use for me as an old woman, I'll get tired of you after a bit and shall want to make a change."

Alma was silent in terror, and for that evening a kind of truce was declared between her haughty obstinacy and the old woman's irrepressible curiosity. For another week she kept a watchful eye upon her young lodger, not in absolute silence, indeed, but without taking any decisive action for the moment; but when she began to fear that Alma's resistance might prove stronger than her own desire to interfere, she swallowed the last remnant of her pride and spoke more plainly:

"I know how my boy in the army got rid of come-by-chances, and then the whole lot lent a hand. And if it's a girl, well, anyway, she's done for from the very first. After all, yours isn't a living being yet. And the best of your life lies before you. Good Heavens! twenty years old! Why that's just when the fun begins. And you're willing to lose all chance of it? No, my dear, I won't be a party to that. I'm a good honest woman with a kind heart."

When she called herself an honest woman with a kind heart she said no more than the truth. She was, however, undeniably possessed by a frenzy for intermeddling, and had acquired a passion for procuration and abortion. Just as in July the German capital, with the straightest streets of any European city exhaled a mingled odour of manure, petrol fumes and lime-blossoms, so there hovered over the honest social life a warm, benign atmosphere of—temperament, shall we say?—a silent frenzy of love for one's fellows, that aimed at bringing too strict points and regulations of morality into greater conformity with human frailty. It was that sincere readiness to "interfere" which must perhaps be looked upon as the defeat of "unprejudiced world-philosophy" by the uninitiated. Life was, first and foremost, to be "strikingly" moral; secondly, strikingly successful; and thirdly, all this was to happen quickly, for people in general suddenly began—although they could not have said why—to feel they were standing on dangerous ground. At such times procuration, whether public or private, is the generally accepted means of intercourse. It is, so to speak, an artificial increase in temperature, which hastens the chemical processes and eases the growth of all permissible organisms. But since not only such organisms but other unpermissible organisms clamour for existence, it is clear that without the services of social procuration life would be unbearable and quickly drive humanity to desperation.

Thus Alma's friend was one of the priestesses who devoted themselves to this meritorious service, and as a former midwife whom the authorities had relieved of her office, as being too prone to diverge from accepted standards, she possessed special qualifications for this position. Her two long yellow teeth or tusks were never still, and her cunning tongue indulgently out-talked one after another of the girl's unuttered scruples, for she knew exactly what such poor little creatures were thinking and feeling. The grey wrinkles on her forehead were always on the move, as aids to her attempts at authority or encouragement, and that pliable nose of hers poked about so intimately into the true state of the matter as regarded Alma's bashfulness that the girl fled before her attack from despair to despair, until at last she did not know which way to turn. If she bolted her door, the old woman spoke to her through the keyhole, and even in the dead of night, when everyone else—including the grey old procuress as well—was asleep, Alma still heard the whispers of her voice.

At last, one evening, the old woman, in order to cut off the cat's tail, as she expressed it, left a bottle of some greenish liquid in Alma's room. The remedy was to be taken, the next day spent quietly in bed, and everything would once more be as was usual in other single young women. Now, however simple Alma might be by nature, she had had the advantage of a good Christian upbringing. She felt it strange herself, but from the very moment when the small green bottle came into the room, Meta's serious spirit, unseen but none the less plainly perceptible, was present there as well. To begin with, following her instinct of self-preservation, she carefully avoided this spirit, preferring to bear instead many pricks of conscience and fits of remorse. In this way, with the mysterious little bottle as room-mate, she felt all night long that the Evil One himself was fighting with Meta's

pious shade for nothing other than her own soul. During the contest many good and mighty words were uttered. Alma distinctly heard her foster-mother say: "Life is sacred. He who kills a soul, kills God who created it"; whereupon the evil spirit scornfully replied: "There's no soul about it yet." Alma almost felt the force of this, but Meta again knew better. "Where there is a body there is also a soul," she declared defiantly. What the Evil One then replied Alma could not catch. She only noticed that the atmosphere became more and more disturbed, and felt her own fear increase. Moreover, the small bottle in the corner of the old worm-eaten chest of drawers glowed with a redoubled demoniacal brilliance that seemed to contain all the dirt and horror which she sensed as belonging to the old woman's natural character.

Once when the room seemed literally full of Meta's very being, of her light and fragrance, Alma ventured to get up, seized the phial, and went to the window to throw it out like an intrusive toad, but then plainly audible laughter behind her served as a reminder that such an action would not settle the matter. Trembling a little and full of dismay, she went back to bed, much oppressed, as she felt that Meta's light and fragrance, which had surrounded her with a familiar feeling of comfort, faded and disappeared as if in disapproval. Henceforth she was left alone with the Evil One and the mysterious light emanating from him, a helpless prey to all the superstitious fancies natural to her heavy material temperament. Now and again her heart raced on, as though she were a child left alone in the dark. She did not want to have anything at all to do with Felgentreu, who crossed her horizon several times during the night; she would not, indeed, let him speak, for it was already bad enough to feel him even from a distance. But more pronounced than all this was her childish defiance, no less than the morose obstinacy with which she tried to combat facts—a weak-

ness indeed from which she had often suffered in the past. That she prided herself so greatly on it made it none the less serious. After such a night, the fresh day found her so ill and weary that she patiently endured all other misfortunes. Under the old woman's eyes she took the Satanic draught, gulping down a cup of strong coffee after it and burying herself in terror under the bed-clothes. She felt as if the devil himself was occupying her body, and pangs of remorse made her shiver and sweat simultaneously. The old witch, however, was so pleased with this preliminary treatment that she went out without more ado to have an exhaustive gossip with a neighbour.

No sooner did Alma hear the snap of the door behind her than she sprang out of bed and ran to the kitchen. There she took a glassful of warm water out of her landlady's dirty pan, ran back again to her bedroom, and vigorously stirred her soap round in it a few times. Armed with this second mixture, she went to the lavatory, and after a deep breath swallowed the whole draught with tight-shut eyes. The effect was both instantaneous and exhaustive; not only did she get rid of the evil spirit she had swallowed, but almost of her own life as well. With trembling knees she at last tried to get back to her room, but turned faint midway and fell headlong to the ground. When she again came to herself, she could not tell whether she had lain there a few minutes only or half an hour. She felt mechanically for the tumbler, struggled to her feet, and, supporting herself by the furniture, at last managed to get into bed. She hid the glass so that the old woman should not come upon it. Her head ached. An instinctive glance as she passed the looking-glass had shown her blood on her forehead and such a distressful image of sunken cheeks, dull eyes and an almost green complexion that Alma had serious forebodings of illness and an early death. A sharp pain flashed through her mind at the thought of dying in disgrace and far from those who

cared for her, but it quickly gave place to indifference again. She felt continual cramp and pain both in stomach and bowels, but this was probably due more to moral than physical causes.

When the old woman returned in great satisfaction from her morning gossip to look to her "room lady," she was not a little shocked to find her in such a condition. Alma explained that she had had to go out and had slipped on the way. She made no reference to any other feeling than a frightful thirst—also imaginary, as in her opinion it seemed an inevitable accompaniment of the demoniacal state in which she was; this the old woman relieved with a glass of cold water. When her patient next complained of cold, she brought her a second cup of strong coffee. Wonderful to relate, Alma kept down both, no doubt from fear lest the old woman should see their return and insist on her beginning the cure all over again. So far, however, the latter seemed satisfied that her patient had "reacted" so well, and most emphatically promised a speedy and successful result. The day passed in this expectation. But when evening came and nothing had happened, the experienced woman thought it would be advisable to supplement with a little different treatment. Alma would scarcely feel it, she promised reassuringly. The patient made no reply to this, but watched her preparations with eyes that boded no good, and might well have warned the old woman had not all her attention been taken up with other aspects of the case. But no sooner did her experienced hand take hold of the bedclothes than she received a blow of the young girl's fist that would have been enough to fell an ox. It had the same effect, too, on this old vampire. With a low groan and a slight shudder she sat down backwards on the floor, where amazement kept her for some considerable time. Alma, however, without giving her another thought, tossed angrily on to her other side, pulled the bedclothes

over her head and vouchsafed no answer to any remarks. The old woman scolded a little but was not seriously offended, scrambled up, gave a rub or two first to her back and then to her nose, stumped up and down the room a few times, considering and muttering, and finally came to the conclusion that it would be better "to let Nature work." This she did by crawling out to treat herself as well with a cup of strong coffee; in her former profession of midwife she was accustomed to drink it by the quart, and she always kept on her stove a great pot of this stimulating liquid. She left Alma's door open behind her, so that she could at any time speak to the invalid and hear, moreover, what she was doing. But that only lasted until Alma noticed what she had done; in a moment she was up out of bed, had slammed and bolted the door, and for the rest of the evening, do what the old woman might, she did not get inside again. Nor did she get the slightest sign of life from her enraged patient. She had never had such a case before, and there was no doubt that it upset her somewhat. That night she slept badly, dreamt of the police court and gaol, and woke up wet with sweat when the clocks were but just striking one.

Alma, on the other hand, slept without stirring, to awake ten hours later to a sense of completely restored health and strength. Nothing had happened to her. In broad daylight she could not be sure if she had saved her soul by her sudden resolve, but at any rate she had rescued her body, and she got up feeling as if she had been born again. In her good spirits she ignored the old fellow opposite, and opened the window to let in the air of the new day and to let out all remaining traces of the old witch's criminal fumes. Finally, she also condescended to open the door, as she felt hungry, and consumed with relish a cup of *café au lait* with two buttered rolls. She gave short answers to all inquiries, got up and dressed. The old woman was almost speechless with surprise.

"Well, well, what a constitution you've got!" she repeated time and again. "If that's to stay, it's all right, but if it's to go, it's as firm as if riveted. We'll have to try a different tune, Fräulein." She turned poetical and caved with languishing eyes: "Let's take a cup; let's take a cup. I'll tip the jug, you drink it up!" Alma, however, continued her toilet in silence, but as she still sang on, the girl was seized with a fit of overwhelming passion.

"Let me alone with your common talk," she screamed, with flaming cheeks, at the nonplussed poet. "Do you want to drive me to ruin? Just mind your own affairs." This rebuff came upon the old woman with all the force and unexpectedness of a sudden mountain storm. Since the night before some great change had taken place in the girl. Without any particular spiritual turn, Alma's nature had in these hours of darkness accommodated itself to her condition; character and breeding had, so to speak, won the victory over crime. This was just the feeling of which she was more keenly aware for the first time to-day, after the midwife's Satanic drugs had burnt out of her several life-destroying impediments; there were, however, plenty still to be dispersed, and she was now filled by a new material sense that had its source in this feeling. For the first time she experienced the force and inner well-being of her altered circulation, and this at once began to influence her idea of herself.

Under the influence of some secret impulse, at once strangely sweet and bitter alike, she ended by starting for a business house where there was some prospect of a post for her. She had put a little sticking-plaster on the cut on her forehead, and combed her hair over it, which gave her a touch of feminine temerity; it made her look a shade more common than she was, and this, combined with the fact that her clothes had not been improved by her constant running about, prevented her general appearance from giving quite the impression which she thought

it conveyed. But the slight fullness of her lips, consequent upon her physical condition, made them stand out against the increased pallor of her face, with all the attraction of some ripe, juicy fruit, and the vague longing in her blue eyes, in their contrast to her wealth of glossy brown hair, had something attractive, not to say provocative, about it. At any rate, every man she met felt a little drawn to her, and at last she herself noticed that many eyes turned in her direction. But she submitted somewhat morosely and with but bad grace to the inspection of the person of importance in the business house, small in stature but great as head of a department. This was her third visit here, and she was again received in the same business-like way, but with an eager look and signs of satisfaction that did not escape her notice. As yet there was no vacancy, but a prospect was held out to her of one at the beginning of the following week.

We must also make a somewhat closer acquaintance with this man, since he provided Alma with her second great experience. Before all else he was a lover, not dealing unimaginatively in ladies' undergarments of all kinds—these were his speciality—but with a highly developed taste for what they covered. He told everyone that he had to take an interest in what the goods looked like when in wear, and this joke he carried out in good earnest and devoted himself to his task with never-flagging zeal and circumspection. For such a mission he seemed better qualified than most men. On the one hand, he knew how to carry it out with the least possible expenditure of money or effort—indeed, he was well known as a specialist in this art; on the other hand, he was a rosy, well-groomed man in his best years, a so-called ladies' man, with well-oiled hair parted straight down the middle and red cheeks that were already a little inclined to sag. His mouth, when he smiled, assumed the curves of a crescent moon, and another distinctive trait was his utter want of considera-

tion towards his subordinates and his obsequious readiness to show to his superiors every courtesy that he thought either desirable or useful. He was, in short, an important and shameless representative of that world which, to a certain extent, may be considered as the employers of women after the style of the ex-midwife.

In accordance with his promise, Alma got her post at the beginning of the following week. She had the privilege of standing behind a counter, wrapping up parcels, calling out "Goods wanted here," taking invoices, and giving customers their purchases in exchange. She was not particularly enamoured of her job, but at least she had found work at last, and was not so completely at her landlady's mercy. At the same time, the continual nagging pain at the loss of Meta's motherly care and all her other privileges seemed to become a little less intense. She had achieved her ambition of an independent position; provided she did her duty, she did not think that anyone could demand anything more from her. It is true, she noticed that her employer began in a most inconspicuous manner to notice her, though she really did not quite know herself how. But here she again trusted to her good up-bringing—we have a tendency to do so with all our moral acquisitions—and ordered her conduct calmly and with a certain purposeful determination, in accordance with Meta's views. For a fortnight the lion prowled round this fawn, until he unexpectedly sprang upon her. As if by accident, he met her on Saturday after shop-hours near her lodgings; he had almost passed without noticing her! Well, how did she like business? he inquired after the handshake for which he had paused, at any rate. Had she got used to the work, and was she pleased with things in general? And was she now on her way to meet her sweetheart? he continued, carefully smoothing down his yellow kid gloves and at the same time attentively looking after all other women and girls that came within sight. A

little pale and weary, and with the timidity to be expected in presence of so influential a personality, Alma replied—in anticipation of another empty Sunday—that she had no sweetheart. At this he expressed his sincere regret. He was really sorry for any young woman who had to work all the week for a poor wage and spend her Sunday without any recreation. Would she like to see a little life this evening and go with him to a variety entertainment? Whilst he was saying this, he forgot the other women and gave his undivided attention to Alma. His impertinent little eyes busied themselves with a last inspection of her pleasing figure. To do this properly he had to stand on tiptoe, so to speak, for she was half a head taller than he. The result of his critical glance seemed to confirm his favourable opinion—at any rate, the crescent curves made their reappearance below his nose. Alma, however, felt a little uncomfortable under this friendliness, but not to annoy him, and also feeling a little honoured, she begged leave to change her dress quickly at her rooms, a request he was good enough to grant.

“Very well, then, but you must be back in ten minutes at the most,” he stipulated. “I’m not fond of waiting.” She ran off, and he looked after her with eyes full of an expert’s smiles and expectation of great things, but in all else he remained what he was.

Moreover, he had grasped that careful handling was needed here, and all that evening he devoted his energies to posing as an attractive personality; but even this was not so easy, for whatever Alma’s present feelings towards Felgentreu might be, the fact remained that she had been uncommonly spoilt as regarded manliness, and did not find it easy to recognize the merits of this new little strutting cock. His standing as an employer and member of the educated classes was often all that saved him from utter downfall in Alma’s estimation.

After the variety programme was finished, he con-

sidered it far too early to part from her, so proposed "to go on the spree" somewhere or other for a little longer. His companion accepted this as a command, and was taken first to a proper supper and then on to the Metropole ball, where his presence in the company of a beautiful, even though somewhat poorly dressed girl attracted enough attention to satisfy him. Everyone saw that this was a *débutante*. He danced with her and neglected no artifice to improve their acquaintance and to strike some responsive note in her, but in this latter aim he was unsuccessful. She obediently followed his lead, responded to his praise by laying aside her respectful attitude, and for her part showed by her bearing that she was of no lowly birth—indeed, in her desire to do him honour, she became more and more demure, somewhat ceremonious, in fact, and although in the joint outings of earlier days she had always rebelled against Meta's rules of propriety, she now went so far as to add to them others of her own invention. Occasionally he found the young creature a little difficult and exhausting. Whenever he tried to question her, she became absent-minded. At last she allowed herself to be taken home by this employer, upon whom she was now beginning to look with a certain astonishment. He even went so far as to hint at a kiss, but she again became deaf, and took leave of him somewhat shortly outside the house door. Yet she went to bed with a tune in her ears which had not been there before; she could well imagine that such an evening, spent with Felgentreu, for instance, might have been the height of bliss, and with this thought she fell asleep.

The old woman would not have been a lodging-house keeper—i.e. a spy by birth and training—if she had not heard the exact instant of her "room lady's" return. And then she fancied she was sufficiently experienced to know what path the young woman would now follow. This turn in events naturally gave her varied food for thought. It is

true she had as yet no reason for any moral objections, but she was annoyed that a fresh "affair" was taking place under her very nose, so to speak, without any assistance from her and with none of the usual pecuniary reward for her services. Further consideration of this point, as she squatted on the kitchen chair drinking coffee, roused her to such a state of "moral indignation" that she felt almost inclined to show the ungrateful young person the door. But as a bill was owing to her, she felt she must act with discretion. She was experienced and sharp-sighted enough to see that the person from whom she had the most to expect was her lodger's new lover, and she decided to use all the resources of her art to further the new connection, which was apparently not without possibilities of profit.

She began operations at dinner-time, when Alma made a tardy appearance with dark circles round her eyes, by recognizing the new state of affairs with a laugh and an admonitory shake of her dirty withered finger; she even went so far as to applaud Alma's cleverness in taking what came her way, now that she had no more to lose, and as Alma ate her dinner, she listened, albeit unwillingly, to the licentious jokes of that low old temptress. When, however, a slight frown made it clear that she resented any interference in her own private affairs, the old woman refrained for the time being from anything more than a few general maxims: that, after all, everything depended on what a man could pay; a girl must set a high value on herself, maintain her self-respect, and then she could do what she liked. As soon as she had gathered from certain signs in Alma's bearing that all was satisfactory in this respect, she rose from her seat and fetched another glass filled with a special kind of preserve for dessert, although, as a matter of fact, dinner was over. Alma took some of the preserve, which had a strong flavour of brandy about it, and suddenly her tongue was loosed as well. With a

half-laugh she said that *his* name was Arthur, and went on with the information that he wore three great rings on his fingers and a big pearl in his tie. But then, without warning, she contracted her brows, pushed back her hair, sighed and relapsed into gloomy silence.

This evening expedition was no isolated exception, as the old woman saw, not without a certain respect for the girl, who was plainly able to make an impression on the man, and she now began to keep her eyes open for the first present of a silk blouse or something of the sort. This week Alma had been out twice up to nearly ten o'clock and on Saturday until after midnight. On Sunday she mentioned that she was going to a party at Arthur's invitation. She came back from it, however, somewhat monosyllabic, and was in a bad temper on Monday. That evening at the supper-table she began quite unexpectedly to speak not of her present but of her former lover, explaining that he was a tall, fair man, very clever and imaginative, and respected by all, rich—here she began to embroider her tale—kindhearted and generous, until the old woman grew quite annoyed and at last asked, a little sharply, why she had run away from him, then. No answer was forthcoming to this inquiry, and Alma's stream, or rather trickle, of eloquence seemed to come to a sudden stop. She returned to her room in a fit of moody depression and did not reappear that evening. The old woman, for her part, was by no means so stupid as not to see that things were not going quite smoothly. The affair was not making any progress, so she, too, lost her temper, which always had a bad effect on her cooking. But this Alma did not apparently notice. The girl was unbearable, would not speak a word for days together, then would burst into sudden fury at the first suspicion of interference or spying, and once stayed three evenings, one after another, "stuck fast" at home, although someone outside was "whistling his lips sore," as the old woman furiously

declared. In the end she was the first to lose patience, and one evening she began saying how hard life was for such a poor old woman, when everyone tried to take advantage of her, how often she'd been cheated already, but she didn't mean to put up with it again. She skilfully worked up to the fact that she must have her money soon—in short, if the account wasn't settled within a week she would apply to Alma's parents.

This threat seemed to leave Alma remarkably cold. Quite misunderstanding the reproach, she said in a peevish tone: "How can I help it if the man runs after me so? We have settled, haven't we, that I will pay up honestly." But the old woman was not very pliable either. In her irritation at Alma's continued change of attitude towards her—one day haughty, the next melancholy—and at the way in which she carried on this affair, contrary as it was to all accepted rules, she was not going to risk her luck on such a card as this, and insisted on a settlement irrespective of all friendly considerations. Alma, for her part, insisted too on the right which she considered honest work gave her, and the more this was disputed, the more persistently she clung to it. She could not be quite sure of securing safety only by her work, earnings and savings, as well as her right to sick-pay. Meantime she was paying for her independence from the Felgentreus by a slight air of shabbiness. This she tried to veil by an air of cool self-possession that alternated with fits of angry depression. And it was fear, far more than desire of money, that induced her to allow the little man and great employer to be for ever making love to her. He was the arbiter of her position and therefore, to a certain point, of her fate as well. And with the distrustful eyes of some frightened hunted fawn, she would study him at rare moments—of which she was afterwards ashamed—to learn the possibilities for her dark future, without, however, finding a single one in him, for he was no Fel-

gentreu—indeed, quite the opposite, as she daily discovered with an ever-growing sense of anxiety.

One thing indeed he did have in common with Emil: he felt her strong attraction and could not forget her. When he was not thinking of business, he was thinking of her. An evening without her was absolutely stale, and he began to make demands upon her time. Her beauty, her disregard of self-defence, her sweet aroma and the harsh notes of her voice—all this excited him, gave him sleepless nights, spoilt his appetite, so that he lost colour and began to grow thin by degrees. That had never happened in any other of his affairs, but it did not make him appreciate her the more, since such a condition was detrimental to his business capacity. He did not, however, allow it to make him deviate from his principles by trying to break down her resistance with handsome presents. On the contrary, he was of the opinion that now was the time to keep her really short, until poverty made her tractable. She never asked him for anything or even indirectly expressed the slightest wish. This not only annoyed him, but he felt there was something uncomfortable about it; he looked upon it as a symptom of insubordination and pride, which must be broken before anything else could be done.

After he had kept her short for a time of all the enjoyments offered by large cities, he determined on a violent measure in his remedial treatment. To win her confidence, he again invited her to a sociable picnic. In so doing, he hoped not only to put her to shame and excite her covetousness by the sight of the other women's frocks, but also to draw her inadvertently, or even willingly, into the stream of love-making carried on by all the couples with whom she would be surrounded. Such was his programme, and under such favourable auspices he led her in the crowd—there were four couples in all—towards the Müggel lake. The other male members of the party were also experienced disciples of free-love and loving freedom,

in which cult their "ladies" were scarcely less expert. There was much talk of presents, bargaining over "gifts," and many complaints of stinginess. Alma noticed with surprise and embarrassment how these creatures looked upon themselves quite naturally as wares which they were trying to sell to the greatest possible advantage. They endeavoured to get as much, and the men to give as little, as possible, but to take all they could in return. This depraved game filled her with shame, with secret wrath, too, against these members of her own sex, and by no means tended to foster any favourable sentiments towards her friend and employer, as he, with his superior knowledge of life, tried to turn the women's minds from such demands, first by poor jokes and then by sentimental philosophy. He spoke of ideal feelings and of true love, and said that, for his part, he felt he must first test a girl's constancy, since so many a one had taken advantage of his good nature and deceived him. He longed for a beautiful, firm and lasting relationship, for a real sweetheart, who would aim not at making profit out of a man but at giving him happiness and beauty in life; for a friend like that a man would do anything, but in his opinion there were not many such. The girls were quite touched by this speech, which gave the signal for a universal outburst of tenderness. Alma was astonished beyond measure that such old worn-out phrases could have so much effect; she had been accustomed to something very different from Felgentreu. Her heart suddenly swelled with uncontrollable emotion, but at the same time she was overcome by a sense of disgust that made her voice a little brusque and harsh; now that she already felt what lay before her, she was doubly on her guard. Evening had fallen; the couples had dropped far apart on the road; the moon shed her pale light over the lake; a somewhat noisy day had given place to a hushed, expectant calm. Late birds were still chirping in the tree-tops; water-fowl were

making themselves heard amongst the reeds, whilst fish were jumping and frogs croaking on a note of satisfaction. Alma thought regretfully how beautiful this walk must be with an honest, honourable lover, whilst the little importunate man and his chatter prevented her from all enjoyment of her love-sick melancholy and the crowding memories awakened by the beauty of the evening. He was now talking with circumspect decision about love, and Alma felt an instinctive sense of fear at his tone. She heard his voice shake and tremble. She sensed his furious desire and the evil lust from which it sprang. His arm had for some time encircled her hips in spite of her vain attempts to free herself from its embrace; now the hand was creeping slowly up and up as he tried to draw her closer to him. But this last effort she did manage to frustrate. She pushed down the hand, too, but it returned, and with increasing discomposure she let it remain. She was already beginning to feel that all her plans for her situation, freedom and future, everything was in jeopardy if she sent this man away again to-day with unfulfilled desire and possibly with the snub from which she could scarcely refrain. Now his stammering, seductive tones sounded close to her ear. She seemed to feel in them the whole antagonism from the very first between his nature and her own. There was no rush, as with Felgentreu, of a mighty storm of generous love, that enveloped her as with a mantle in the lightning flash and fire of surrender, but merciless defilement and forcible humiliation.

Suddenly she felt his arm round her neck, and at the same time she saw his fiery eyes just below her own. His face, already hot with a half-triumphant flush, pushed forward to her pale and anxious features. Now she had no longer a single thought to spare for Felgentreu, nor for her future either, but devoted all her strength to increasing her resistance. She bent back her head and averted her face. As he now pulled harder, she resisted him with her

hand pushed against his shoulder. As in a dream, she heard him groan: "Now, girl, don't play the prude. Don't drive me to fury, d'ye hear?" And taking advantage of a slight weakening in her defence, he got her into his grasp. She saw with horror his agility, but then she cast aside the last of her scruples, and, since it proved utterly impossible to shake him off, she made use of her nails. That took effect. With a suppressed cry of pain he let her go. In a second his face was scored with streaks of blood. For a moment he stood quite pale with amazement and looked at her in evident wrath as she stood before him with heaving chest and flashing eyes.

"That's the kind of master you are!" she said, her lips trembling with indignation. "But I'm not that kind of employee. Why don't you let me alone?" Her eyes filled with tears of distress and anger. "I only want to work and earn my bread honestly," she exclaimed with passionate emphasis. "Why do they all plague and persecute me? Now you as well! And you haven't any right to do it——" She would gladly have said more, but as the words all came together to her lips, none could be distinguished, and she stopped with every sign of utter discouragement.

He drew his linen handkerchief out of his pocket when he felt the blood trickling down, and the sight of the red stains stirred him to activity again. She thought he would now break into abuse, but the physical insult he had received proved too great a shock.

"So it's the uttermost contempt, is it?" he observed, in an angry threatening tone. "Well, just you wait; you'll regret it yet! Scratched my face, did you? All right, then—I've something to tell you now. I'll give you three days to beg my pardon. If you haven't been to me by Wednesday noon, you can consider yourself dismissed. Then you may look out where you'll find another place."

With a gesture of embittered irritation, he turned his back on her and proceeded to follow the others. He did

not waste another thought on Alma, who could follow him or not as she chose; he had made up his mind to take no further notice of her until she had been brought to her knees. For this blood of his he meant to have something more than sweet revenge. She recognized at once what harm she had done her position as she really reproached herself a little for having so maltreated a man who was her employer. When all was said and done, she already felt almost inclined to regret her action. But then she thought of the assault she had suffered and flushed with rage again. That she could not forget. Absorbed in thought, she followed her solitary path behind her employer, saw him diligently dab his cheek, with a feeling of worry that she could not explain. To-day for the first time she knew what absolute discouragement meant. This at times alternated with resentment, that found vent in those fits of temper which she knew of old, but this evening there was no one to take any notice of her. Even when they all assembled together afterwards at the station, the others managed so to group themselves that she was left standing by herself. No one spoke to her; no one appeared to see her even. It seemed as if their one aim was to make her humble herself and submit to her tormentor. If she had any idea that he might in the first impulse of a more conciliatory attitude see her home from the station, she was much mistaken. He took a ceremonious leave of the others and went off without even a glance in her direction. Then in silence, her pulse throbbing with anger, she took the tram without even attempting to say good-night to the rest of the party and rode home.

She was now so absorbed in her worries and looked so gloomy that she attracted the attention of several other passengers. She did not notice it, for even in her absorption she was still like a child, sunk in deepest gravity without the least self-consciousness; there was not a trace of coquetry about her, with the single exception

perhaps that she would boast a little on occasions when she thought it policy to do so. Moreover, she did not need much meditation to know that in the present state of affairs there was no sense in going back to work only to be dismissed in disgrace. She was quite sufficiently convinced that her employer meant what he said, and as she also knew her own character, she thought the best course was to stay in bed the next morning and to give business the go-by. In this she enjoyed a little triumph over her opponent, whom she hoped to take down a peg or two by her sudden absence.

But he, too, we must mention, considered it advisable to stay at home on Monday and Tuesday and give his wounds a chance to heal, and during that time he was pleased to think he was keeping the haughty, obstinate girl on tenterhooks. Those are bad disputes indeed out of which the two at variance do not both manage to get some satisfaction. But when he went back to business on Wednesday and heard that Alma had never reappeared, neither he nor his subordinates had a happy day.

CHAPTER XV

FELGENTREU began to show signs of failing under the constant strain, and his usual cheerful—even if for some time not always gay—temper began to be transformed into silent melancholy.

He had had no further talk with Meta since the Sunday of Alma's flight, nor did he need it, for he saw she remained as watchful and prepared for what might happen as she had been before.

Whenever he gave any sign of stronger emotion, the sudden spark that flashed in her eyes never failed to frighten and intimidate him.

It seemed as though her stern self-control was breaking down in places and giving signs of a new life of sorrow and of apprehension; he was afraid of this new life, for reasons which he could not explain, but was compelled to obey, since they arose from a conviction that it would be fatal for him to drive her to any decisive step. Thus he lived, intimidated, brooding, uneasy, restrained by his sympathy with her, staring like a prisoner out of a cell window, that every day moves higher and higher up the wall, into the world beyond, and gradually deteriorating in every way. Not that he showed any outward indication of this; he had too much self-respect to do so, as well as too great a wish to offer a bold front to the world—a result of that serious outlook inherent in all simple health and vital force. He carried out his duties in the factory with all his wonted care and keen interest, did not drink more than before, and came and went at his usual hours. At night he resolutely slept on the sofa, and Sundays he passed within doors as if waiting for something. He had sold all his birds to a bird-fancier so as to be ready at any time.

If he was not wandering from room to room in his usual thoughtful study of all they contained, he was standing—whilst Meta was absent—filled with love and an agony of longing in Alma's room, in silent converse with all the possessions she had left behind.

He had always been prone to slight attacks of melancholy, and he now began to imagine that Meta's health was failing. One day he found her sitting as usual by the window, a little tired perhaps, with her head propped on her hand, and with no sign of any work by her. This, and the fact that she did not take any special notice of his entrance, at once made him feel certain that she was ill. She scouted the idea, it is true, but he knew by experience how bad things must be before she would own to not being well.

Besides, in the last few weeks she had certainly grown

paler and thinner. Her eyes were more sunken and surrounded by darker shadows, whilst the silver threads in her hair made it appear a much lighter shade than before. So far this was no more than natural, but from that moment he experienced a feeling of sadness that had three results: first it made him despondent, secondly it made him even more keen in continuing his wonted observations, and thirdly he extended their sphere of activity and thus increased his anxiety on her account. He would now lie awake for almost the whole night through, listening to hear if she coughed, groaned, or called out in her sleep. He swallowed his food merely to keep himself going, scarcely knowing what he was eating; he turned over what was put before him with the greatest indifference, and every bite all but choked him. He lost flesh and colour alike; but whilst the same process aged Meta, it had the opposite effect on him, and increased his youthful appearance. She noticed both these facts with a certain misgiving. "He has had to be too old," she thought sadly. "I wonder if it was good for him."

By slow degrees he began to speak of his observations and fears to others. When anyone from another of the house flats inquired how his wife was, he would look worried and reply: "I don't know; lately I haven't been at all happy about her. She seems so tired and doesn't eat. Once she had an internal tumour and it was so long before I could get her to go to the doctor that it was all but too late." Thus other people also, by slow degrees, became convinced that Frau Felgentreu was not well, and to her astonishment they began speaking to her of how much work she must have without Alma, and to give her advice about her health. Since her looks gave colour to the report, she could not put an end to it as quickly as she wished to, and it was some considerable time before she could find out what had given rise to it. At first she was frightened and went home quite depressed, to sit motion-

less all morning, as was her custom when anything upset her. But when she saw Emil again, and noticed how attentively he scanned her face, her fear changed into a feeling of mystification; she did not know what to think of him. She could not doubt that he was really anxious about her, and yet she dare not look upon this as a sign of returning affection, for in his inmost heart, as she plainly saw, his fears and anxiety were always centred on Alma.

As she turned all this over in her mind, her head bent a little more, the lines round her mouth grew sharper, and her expression more grieved—a change which he could not fail to notice with ever-increasing anxiety on her account.

Old Lippke, too, in the natural course of events, also became involved in this feeling of strained anxiety. A few days after the funeral and the subsequent scene in his flat, the two old acquaintances chanced to meet at the factory gate, and both, struck by something in each other's look and bearing, instinctively stopped. Lippke was feeling lonely and in need of someone to speak to after the reaction resulting from the excitement of that day, and Felgentreu had never once in his life borne a grudge against anyone for a merely personal insult, least of all against someone whose misery he so clearly understood. Lippke in a few faltering words explained his late behaviour as "madness," tried to make out he had been drunk, and although it was not quite clear whether he felt any oppressive sense of guilt, he was plainly suffering from the loss of his wife. Afterwards, when inquiring how Felgentreu was getting on, he heard that Meta was not very well, and went with a thoughtful look on his face into the factory. From then on Meta's condition was a constant theme of conversation between the two men. The other point of interest that they had had in common until then seemed no longer to exist—at any rate it was

never mentioned. Only an occasional glitter in the corner of Lippke's eyes, or a fleeting side-glance, might have shown Felgentreu that the old man had forgotten nothing, but neither of these apparently caught his attention. Although the sorrow of seeing the steady deterioration in his wife's health prevented all other observations, yet he was constantly so distressed by Lippke's desolation without his wife, and by his truly horrible loneliness in the ruins of his home, that he almost felt this, combined with his own suffering, made, so to speak, a common bond between them. Such an idea was a new suggestion to his distraught imagination, and he responded to it by still more gloomy pictures of Meta's state of health. Lippke, on his side, listened to these, and spent his nights in painting them in even darker colours. He was by no means disinclined to see in all this a divine judgment hanging over Felgentreu, and since, amid all the changes of that time, this woman remained the one and only fixed point, he could not foresee anything but advantage for himself and his son should she be removed. He imagined that Felgentreu would view the matter in much the same way. After Emil's recent declaration, he was not disposed to look upon his affair with Alma as anything more serious than a gentleman's passing fancy. According to his fixed tradition, it would not come to marriage; Julius therefore still remained the one claimant for both girl and money. If anything should "happen" to Meta, in his opinion Felgentreu would follow the dictates of reason, and make use of his freedom immediately to look for a second wife with much more money and of better birth. Not only would that put an end to the affair with Alma, but the 50,000 marks would be available, since the hand that now held them fast would be gone. Lippke had a very poor opinion of Felgentreu's power of self-protection; in his opinion it would be easy to get everything from him as soon as there was no one left to watch over him.

He found the days long in his anxiety for evening to come and bring with it another meeting with Felgentreu. He had not thought that he could ever again "be so friendly with him"; he was now quite sure that he had been right in thinking him a gentleman of doubtful honour, and congratulated himself on having at the funeral "gone straight for him" and come to a clear understanding "how the land lay." So at times he was edified beyond measure that the hand of an avenging judge was hovering over Felgentreu, and at times felt real refreshment in noticing how difficult Emil found it to hide his satisfaction at the bad reports he brought. He never noticed the contradiction between these points of view. Felgentreu, however, realized what state of mind Lippke was attributing to him, and became more and more disconsolate. By chance, as so often happens, Meta really did get a chill, and had to stay in bed—a new experience for her. Lippke heard she was in bed, but not that she had got up again, because Felgentreu, also by chance, did not happen to mention it, and the old man pictured her wasting away day and night in her struggle with death, and anxiously awaited events. He did not dare to inquire any more, and so all the more restlessly kept his eyes and ears on the alert, to spy on Felgentreu. This giddy edifice of his imagination one day suddenly collapsed entirely over his head. It was on a Sunday evening, when he was going to the factory to begin his work as night-watchman. The world was full of light and gaiety; the swallows had long since arrived, and were flying high in the last rays of the sun under the blue heavens. Here and there a blackbird was singing on some sunlit gable; in the streets of a great city this note has a special charm and a wild sweetness that it lacks in every other spot, be that where it may. Children were playing on the asphalt with utter disregard of all around them or with a precocity that aped their elders; ordinary folk were strolling

along the pavements or riding with an air of great importance in some hired vehicle. Amid all this Sunday traffic the old man in his workaday clothes was walking along absorbed in his own thoughts and speculations. He missed not having a chance of meeting Felgentreu to-day to hear his daily report; he felt as restless and helpless as a morphia victim who suddenly has to do without his injection. He was, moreover, disturbed that Julius had to-day entirely put his work aside for the first time in many years. Without touching a book, he had let the long hours slip by, as he sat inactive and distraught, without even shaving or putting on his Sunday clothes; not even Clara's entreaty to go out with her had succeeded in moving him. Since she had no longer any girl friend left, she too had stayed at home to-day, and old Lippke was filled with an anxiety that defied all his usual swagger.

As he furtively glanced along the road before him, he saw coming in the opposite direction a couple whom he absolutely could not believe were the people he had fancied at first sight. In his dismay he opened both eyes and mouth as far as they would go, but the image remained unchanged, and showed him plainly the two Felgentreus walking, slowly certainly, but firmly and with a definite purpose, on their way to the great thoroughfare where the trams ran, evidently intending, as he went on to tell himself, to get from there into the city. There was nothing else to lead them in that direction. They were not talking, but looking with grave self-composure straight in front of them, and neither of them seemed the least disconcerted as they recognized him. If Felgentreu had blushed, made any attempt to avoid him, turned back, or even appeared embarrassed, Lippke would have felt a certain moral triumph in all his terrible material disappointment. Instead of that, it was quite evident that Meta was not in the least ill or confined to her bed, and they seemed to find it quite a matter of course that she was fit to go out

with her husband on Sunday evening. He felt absolutely thunderstruck when Felgentreu greeted him in quite his usual manner. Meta, too, shook hands calmly, inquired after his health, asked how Clara managed her house-keeping, and again expressed her personal sympathy in his bereavement. Whilst he muttered his replies, he noticed that she frowned at his remarks, and even Emil seemed astonished. Boiling with rage and half-stupid with disappointment, he burst out with a counter-inquiry: "Well, and what about you? You seem to be going pleasuring. Then I suppose you've given death the slip again! My wife had to go. Heartiest congratulations!"

"What do you mean?" Meta asked, looking up in amazement. "Have I been ill, then?"

"Well, I thought you had," he answered with some discomfiture. "Hadn't you to stay in bed?"

She hesitated a moment as a strained look appeared in her eyes and a meditative frown on her forehead. "Oh, is that it?" she said, at last understanding. "Yes, that is right so far. Last week I kept my bed for two or three days." She stopped short in annoyance, and as she turned her face away from him, a short silence followed. Felgentreu, on the contrary, fixed his eyes inquiringly on the old man; a sudden shadow of comprehension passed over his features, but instead of the embarrassment he had expected, Lippke caught only that same look of deepest penetration which had already robbed him of many a triumph. But before Emil had time to say anything conciliatory, Meta put an end to the scene with an impatient gesture. "Well, we will not detain you any longer," she said in a distinctly cooler tone, and shook hands casually, scarcely even glancing at him. "You will have to be getting on to your work."

Felgentreu also dismissed him. "I have forgotten my tobacco and left it in my corner," he said in a tone of propitiation; "you can take a pipeful of it."

The old man stumbled on, feeling absolutely stupefied.

On the evening following this encounter the old man passed Felgentreu in the factory yard in utter silence, with tightly closed lips and icy eyes fixed straight in front of him. This was quite in accordance with his usual somewhat theatrical bearing, but Emil rightly judged that their mutual relations had since the preceding day entered on a new stage. His wild beast had changed his attitude, and he must now expect fresh happenings. But to his surprise this all now seemed to him strangely remote; even Meta's ill-health had, so to speak, become less apparent, and his grief on her account was now no more than an unconscious inner sob.

Yesterday, for the first time after a long period of seclusion and grief, he had again seen young girls and loving couples, heard gay talk and merry laughter, and noticed so much else reminding him of Alma that his longing for her once more rose mountain-high.

There was some touch of her in every woman that he saw: here the glance, there the walk, in another the lines of her figure; often it was only the turn of the head that made his heart stop beating, or a sudden tone of voice so thoroughly roused him from his lethargy that he instinctively looked in the direction of its owner. It was never Alma, but always a Berlin girl, with hair dressed like hers, wearing the same kind of blouse with the fashionable lace collar or the smart little hat just then the rage, and in which he had seen her go out with Meta times without number. When he returned from this half-enchanted outing, he had once more a living vision of Alma, vibrant with all that fresh young life for which his whole being had wept and now began to cry aloud. Henceforth this cry was never silent; this renewed longing obscured all other problems and even dangers for him, so that he no longer attached the same importance to what Lippke might or might not think of him—indeed, even the sym-

pathy that formed a bond of union between him and this disappointed creature was pushed into the background by the plans he began to make, slowly but surely, to find Alma once more. A new eager light shone in his eyes. His face betrayed an alertness which had not been there before that Sunday. Not that he slept better or ate more; on the contrary, he wasted away more and more painfully. His loneliness too increased, because he had no one in whom he could confide, so that his perplexity was transformed by degrees into silent, hopeless despair. Sometimes lately he had thought of the advice he had given young Lippke, but now, when he really began to pray, his petitions seemed but empty words, and had brought him no divine help as yet. But one evening when he was walking home in weary silence from the factory—lately, to avoid the daily annoyance of coming into contact with old Lippke and his monotonous show of senile dislike, he had come out another way—he met two children on the street who were blubbing at the top of their voices. Emil at once spoke to them. The one was a red-cheeked, dark-skinned little girl five years old or so, whose floods of tears were joined by two tributary streams from her nose, all of which she rubbed in her distress quite indiscriminately over the whole of her face. The other was a fair-headed four-year-old boy, with the flap of his little knickers unbuttoned and hanging down at the back, and so full of brotherly co-operation that he was screaming too, without really knowing what was wrong. After all kinds of friendly sympathy and inquiries, Felgentreu at last learnt that the little girl had lost some money.

"Yes, yes," was Emil's grave comment. "Now tell me how much was it, one groschen or two?"¹

"A mark,"¹ howled the little lass, whilst her nose sent out a fresh bubble of despair that shone like mother-of-pearl in the soft evening light, as long as it lasted.

¹ A mark = ten groschen.

"That's quite a lot, to be sure," Emil agreed. "I am not at all sure whether any of the people hereabouts have so much money in their pockets. But have you looked for it well? Where did you lose it? Just here?"

"Just here!" screamed the child, and began her loud bellowing again, as if the crowning misfortune of all was to have lost her money "just here."

Felgentreu pondered for a moment. To-day he was specially full of heartfelt fears for Alma, and all through the passing hours he had longed to be able to pray from the depths of his soul, "Heavenly Father, let me find again what I have lost." But all the time he had seemed to feel that there was some barrier between him and the Source of all mercy.

"I'll tell you what!" he now said, with a sudden rush of inspiration, to the children. "We must tell the good God about this. It is too much money for a man to find all by himself. We'll just be quick and say a prayer: 'Dear heavenly Father,' " he said in passionate longing, "let us find again what we have lost. Amen!" Now, then, we'll look once more. I tell you if we make our find, everything will be all right again. And if one of you finds it, you shall have another groschen as well—so keep your eyes open!"

The children, in their amazement at these unusual preparations, had stopped howling, and now, already half-comforted, they turned their wet eyes to search the street, with a growing greed, indeed, at the prospect of an extra groschen. The little brother put a hand on each wide-apart knee, and, bending forward like some old grandfather, conducted his search at a very short range back over the pavement, in his innocence quite unmindful of the unbuttoned flap hanging down behind. At last, five paces in front of him, Emil noticed in the wet by the curbstone a flat, round, shining object. His troubled eyes lit up joyfully, although he said nothing, but once more deferred any action in order to use the incident as a "test."

"If only the children find it by themselves," his superstition prompted him to think. He waited in eager anxiety, and purposely looked in quite another direction. Suddenly the little girl cried, "There it is!" darted forward, fell on her nose in the dirt, and got up covered with mud from head to foot, but triumphantly holding the silver coin in her outstretched hand. The corners of the small brother's mouth went down suspiciously because he had not been the finder, but Emil gave a groschen to each, and off they went hand in hand in great content. The little girl turned one more inquiring gaze in his direction, whilst her brother, in his open knickers, toddled along by her side with an air of great self-satisfaction. Felgentreu too, with a sigh of relief, continued his homeward journey. No inspiration had come so far, but his heart was lighter and his head clearer, and that is the right mood for fresh mental illumination.

Indeed, before he reached home it had come. In front of the street corner there was an advertisement stand with all kinds of placards and announcements. Since Alma's disappearance he had passed it at least one hundred and twenty times without its giving any ideas at all. But now suddenly he had a mental vision of one of those touching announcements:

Gussie, come back. All is forgiven.

And all at once he knew what he must do. Instead of turning in at his own door, he passed on to the next printing-office, where he ordered the following appeal:

ALMA, give some sign of life, or it will end badly.—E. F.

ALMA was to stand in large letters at the top, and he chose a fine bright red paper for the notice. The printer told him to what company he must go to arrange about putting it up, and on the next day but one Felgentreu's appeal was flaming on all the advertisement stands in

North and East Berlin. It flamed, too, at his own street corner, where it met Meta's troubled glance, and on the way to the factory, where Lippke stood for a long time studying it with a sour expression on his face. With renewed vexation he recognized the renewal of energy evinced by this announcement, and felt it as a triumph over him and the whole house of Lippke. "Never mind; just wait," he muttered into his short beard. "Your day will come!"

A little later he saw Felgentreu, in conversation with one of the engineers, slowly crossing the factory yard on his way to the other exit. There was little that could have annoyed him more than the sight of Emil's calm and upright bearing, in spite of all his grief and perplexity, but in the old man's eyes he was overshadowed by death. Why he felt this he could not have said, but it seemed to him that the reaper's hand had marked Emil with a secret sign.

Meanwhile Felgentreu was living in a day-dream. In resolute faith he had taken a room and kitchen, and began to furnish them out of the money he had saved since Alma had gone. For, later on, he thought of buying a whole suite on the instalment system, which would furnish a two-room flat quite well enough to begin with.

CHAPTER XVI

ALMA's kind-hearted landlady at last saw, as clearly as anyone could desire, that she had been greatly mistaken in her protégée.

One fine afternoon she betook herself to the next beer-shop, where she asked, with the greatest decision, for a Berlin *weisse*¹ and the directory.

¹ *Weisse* = light beer; a Berlin speciality.

From this she copied all the Klammes—Alma's family name. There were eleven of them, amongst whom, in her opinion, a barrister and the artisans might be discounted at once. That left a merchant, a teacher, a dental mechanic, and other representatives of the middle class. To these, with much toil and trouble, and almost tears of wrath at the brain strain which this girl was causing her, she addressed short inquiries as to whether they had a daughter called Alma who had disappeared, because, if so, she knew her address. This seemed to her the best way to get her money. All her notes resulted in just two replies—from the teacher and the merchant—both in the negative.

Then she wrote as well to the barrister and to the artisans, this time only hearing from the former, who shortly but emphatically put a stop to all demands on the part of those who kept houses of ill-fame by well-turned threats of notification to the police authorities. Either Alma was not a native of Berlin or her landlady's reliance on her having parents who could pay was not justified by facts, and she had again been "diddled." After this occurrence, she hobbled about for a whole morning in her den of a house whimpering to herself and cursing the scrape she was in, but then decided to inveigle the girl into having a friendly talk with her. As a good preparation, her cooking showed a wonderful turn for the better in that day's dinner. When Alma came to table, she found a little pork roast and a landlady whose cordiality left nothing to be desired. Alma had not seen the like for many a long day, and, with a little laugh, she said surely it was a birthday feast. This her hostess did not deny; on the contrary, she held out the prospect of an extra strong cup of coffee afterwards, and Alma grew proportionately more talkative and frank than she had been for long. Quite by chance the conversation happened to touch on life's pleasures, and then on love,

of which the old woman also could have told something, but when talking to Alma she humbly took quite a subordinate place. She had never been so beautiful, and that was what counted the most.

"Such as you simply put an end to an affair when you have had enough of it," she acknowledged. "And quite right too, not to bind yourself down. Will an unfeeling fellow like that help you when hard days come? He'd never think of such a thing! All they want is to amuse themselves with the poor girls, and afterwards the scoundrels show a clean pair of heels. Fräulein, my dear, how would it be, now, if you just tried to make it up by degrees with your family? It can't go on like this for ever. See you don't call down heaven's curse on yourself; that's a thing not easily got rid of."

Then she began in quite friendly fashion to show how now at last she really must have her money; she was not asking a decided answer on the spot, but explained that she would be glad to be able to look forward to a settlement pretty soon, and thus they parted quite amicably for that day—only Alma bent her head a little lower and her eyes glowed with flickering light, that betrayed her secret agitation. Instinctively she began to think: "If only it could happen, all my troubles would soon be at an end." She spent all afternoon brooding in her room. And Meta's form appeared before her mind's eye again, but in much more motherly guise than on that night of the little green bottle. She seemed to hear once more the tales she used to tell. Her speciality, though, had been the pictures she cut out with her scissors, and, with a heart full of longing, Alma fetched hers, to make all kinds of figures out of newspaper and parcel covers, just as she used to do with Meta through many an evening, for their life had not by any means been always wanting in harmony. There was one little man especially, with a hump and an enormous nose, whom she christened

"the little wish-man" and credited with all sorts of powers and secrets. But he was very capricious, and if his hump and nose turned out too small, one might easily get the very opposite of one's wishes. But just as she was about to wish, she found her requests to the little man were so great and complicated that she dropped her hands in discouragement.

The tears rose to her eyes, and only the remembrance that she was now quite grown up, and even an expectant mother, kept her from a fit of despairing sobs. But her cheerful calm was at an end, with all her soothing dreams. Nevertheless, she tried to picture to herself what a letter to Meta would look like, and occupied herself, not without many a sigh, in trying to compose one both then and on the following day. But everything about Felgentreu and the child must be most scrupulously avoided, and the letter therefore lost all point. Her mortal need was in search of some power that might solve her problems, but, found none; she was earth-born with earthly desires, and what earth did not give her, heaven itself could not supply. One soul, and one alone, offered her liberty and delight in this life on earth, and that was Felgentreu, the only heaven that she could ever picture.

And she had at this time many memories of him too. Always when Meta could not solve the difficulties in Alma's home-lessons, he had to come, and things that no teacher could hammer into her he would explain in three or four words. At such times he would only say: "Look at me now, Alma, child; it's written quite plainly in my eyes." And so it was; all he had to do was just to explain what stood there. Sometimes with Meta there would be a difference of opinion over the homework, and then a summary dismissal, but such a thing never happened with him; everything went on smoothly, and when the session rose, he had talked about hundreds and thousands of things, and she had understood her own

work almost as a something by the way. Then her thoughts flew to his wood-carving and mechanical feats. Alma ought really to have been a boy, for she was cut out for that by nature. He used to install in the kitchen little hammer-mills which he worked from the main, until the whole floor was swimming, and Meta turned them both out with a sound reproof. At Christmas he would saw and glue for weeks to make a village church with lights and bells inside and a star shining on the top of the tower, its roof sparkling with snow, to say nothing of the icicles which he always scattered with so prodigal a hand; close to the entrance the subdued light of a lantern shone upon the crèche with Mary and Joseph, oxen, asses, and all the rest. On that evening Alma had been very much touched and gentle. But next year she had already begun to develop into a young lady, who no longer believed in the stork of her childhood, nor, so she declared, in the devil either, a grown-up declaration which Meta rewarded with an equally surprising box on the ears. Felgentreu stepped in as peace-maker, and set his latest masterpiece in action. This was a chime of electric bells, like one he had once seen on a larger scale in the Apollo Theatre. By dint of much trouble and perseverance he had managed to buy eight house-bells fairly in tune with the musical scale, and one mysterious evening joined these to an electric battery by connecting wires, running under cupboards, behind the couch, and wherever else he thought practicable, so hidden that nothing could be seen but a little keyboard under the Christmas-tree. He sat down before this and began to play, "Oh, thou joyous, Oh, thou blessed!" The "Oh" sounded from below the sideboard, the "thou" a little too high—from the bedroom—whilst the "joyous" came from four different directions, first from under the sideboard once more, then down from a curtain-pole, out of an empty bird-cage, only to soar up to the curtain-pole once more, where the

same entertaining and surprising variety began again with the second line of the hymn. The rest of the tune was played, not only on the same points, but also on the clock, behind the sofa, and outside in the vestibule, as well as in the table-drawer. The whole proceeding gave the greatest satisfaction to Alma, but less to Meta, who did not like her possessions scattered about and could feel no devotion amidst all this mechanism. These were, moreover, as Alma also remembered, the last occasions on which Felgentreu had made anything for Christmas.

By degrees he left off teasing and playing with her, and, as she grew into a young lady, he became more and more of a city man and fine gentleman. The expeditions to the surrounding country came to a full-stop—in short, as she now looked back from a distance, it seemed to her as if, since then, the family had gradually become less united in every respect. "If I go back," she said to herself, "we must at once begin our outings together again." But suddenly something tapped her on the shoulder. "Have you forgotten everything again so soon, Alma, my dear?" The light turned to darkness. She was lonely and rejected, housed in a rat-hole with a quarrelsome old woman, who, moreover, wanted to drive her out, and at the thought she gave her shoulders a fatalistic shrug. Those times were gone, and to get rid of her memories she put on her hat and went out.

The improvement in food remained a distinguishing mark of her tyrant's housekeeping during the next few days as well. It was kept up for as long a time as seemed necessary, on a very generous computation, for the re-establishment of friendly relations between a child and her family, even though the latter might be living in Memel or Strasburg. One midday, however, Alma found an entirely different state of affairs, a more horrible meal than she had ever had before, even there, and the notification papers required by the police regula-

tions on her plate. In answer to her question what she was to do with them, she got the snappy information: "I can't keep you any longer in the house without notification, ungrateful as you are. After all, I've got my reputation to consider, and what excuse can I make, if you haven't been notified according to law? And besides that, you can just look out for some other quarters; you don't pay, so I don't need to give you the regulation notice." And therewith began the most marked period of Alma's exile. The three worthless bits of paper she threw on one of the rubbish-heaps that formed the major portion of her bedroom, and went out, walking like a stranger through the city, looking in the shop-windows and taking a cup of coffee somewhere or other as long as her money lasted. She had handed over the whole of her first month's wages to her landlady, to get free of debt as soon as possible, and had forfeited all the second by her summary departure, after having earned three-quarters of it. She would glance at the newspapers too, partly to pass the time and partly to see how other people tried to get posts; now and again, too, she would scrutinize some man, without any desire to know him, since he was not Felgentreu.

Thus, without any settled plan, and half-absorbed in her own thoughts, Alma passed the next three or four days. On the fifth it rained, and she almost unconsciously let it slip by whilst she stayed in her room. What annoyed her most was the importunate and emphatic threats with which the old woman was perpetually bombarding her. She absolutely poisoned the silent, inactive, stay-at-home life of this girl, who was naturally of such an active temperament. She had no lover, no work, no money; she was with child and had broken with her family; the old witch felt she would like to know what she was relying on. "You'll just have to make her march," she said to herself in true admonitory fashion. So one day

she informed Alma she must find a dinner somewhere else, as she didn't feel sure she would ever see the colour of her money again.

"Or perhaps your father is a city knight," she suggested venomously. "I should think so, by the way you rest from your labours. Have you ordered the furniture-van for your move? You'll need it a full twelve yards long for the quantity of stuff you carry about with you, to mention nothing more than your clothes. And what's coming to get you yourself—an eight-seater or a carriage and four horses?"

That day Alma had neither dinner nor supper. With her last coin she bought a piece of bread that she ate dry without any addition. On the following day she wondered if she should pawn her little gold watch, a present from Felgentreu at her confirmation; she did but cast a quick glance at it, and turned away without a word. Then she had a little brooch with a cross of some kind of green stone, a gift of Meta's; she would certainly have got ten marks for it, if not more, but she only looked sadly at it too, and fastened it on her dress with twice her usual care. Nor could she part even from the silver ring on her finger that had come from Clara. She could no more bear to part with anything that had once belonged to her than from one of her hands or eyes. On that point she had always shown a quite characteristic unswerving obstinacy, which had of old been the cause of many stormy scenes at home. That day, too, she lived on nothing but the breakfast that the old woman gave her.

Alma was now often spoken to by men in the street, although with her somewhat pale and thin cheeks, and her lithe young figure already showing signs of ampler proportions, with the full, firm lines of her red lips and the liquid depths of her eyes—when she chanced to raise them from the ground or withdraw them from the far-off distance, where they were generally fixed in gloomy

thought—with the somewhat careless arrangement of her hair and her really very shabby garments, she certainly did not give the impression of a girl of low character, but of an enterprising young woman who, for some reason or other, had come down in the world. Lately the hunger so plainly evident in her eyes had deepened such an impression. The sight of provisions in a shop-window was enough to make her stomach contract with a craving for food and the thin cheeks fall in. In such a condition one would naturally think she was ripe for prostitution and not likely to refuse any offers. She saw well enough, too, how others managed, but it never struck her that such a way of escape was open to her too.

She looked upon these girls as beings of another kind, without, however, feeling herself either better or happier than they. She only felt different, and probably considerably less happy. And, above all else, she felt irrevocably bound to that one man only, and this it was that decided her whole fate and controlled her every action.

It now wanted but a few days to the first of the month, and her landlady began talking about the police. This at last made some impression on her and helped to rouse her from her lethargy. Other facts of life beside her approaching motherhood and the passionate longing of her heart began to exercise her mind. Something must be done now. Her only possibilities were Meta, Felgentreu, and also a third, of which she had not yet thought, but which, heavy with fate, lay silently waiting in her subconscious mind. She had now reached a state of silent resignation. Defiance, indignation, grief and anger were all merged in a great deep sorrow. She no longer bore a grudge against anyone, not against Meta, who barred her way to Emil; not against Felgentreu, who had seduced her and brought her to misery; nor even against the old woman, with her never-ceasing threats. To-day she stood

if she chose such a way of escape.

A little later she stood on the Stralau bridge, still more under the spell of her youthful ideas of death, gazing with a far-away look in her eyes up and down the glistening waters of the Spree, where so many had found ease and consolation. There often stood an announcement in the newspapers, "Body of a woman found—identity unknown"; often, too, such an event happened without any announcement being made; notice or none, it was exactly the same to the one who had gone. A sudden wave of emotion overpowered her: how she had suffered and pined, brooding over her troubles, filled with fierce desires and battling against every adversity. Her immediate past lay like an abyss of unfathomable misery behind her, and now a dark foaming billow was already threatening to overwhelm her life entirely. It seemed a matter of course that a girl like her should throw herself into the water. As on her way to church that Sunday in the past, her eyes grew big and grey, filled with a look of eager hope. Her emaciated face assumed a pathetic and melancholy expression of weariness of life and desire for the haven of death. "I can go into the water still for his

* Nepomuk, national saint of Bohemia, was put to death by being thrown from the bridge of Prague into the Vltava.

sake!" she thought, and felt herself sinking, filled with the thought of her love. All the past floated clearly before her, as if she were already drowning; she heard once more the language of love, once more she was overpowered by the all-embracing sweetness of that first kiss of mutual devotion and surrender. With superhuman force she remembered, with a self-surrender which she had refused since her flight, the paralysing charm of his mastery of her body. There was no longer any childish inexperience about her. All her thoughts and feelings gained in maturity, knowledge, width and depth in the soft light of her suffering. Thus, lost in these perilous dreams, she watched the boats softly floating on the water, noticed, with a growing sense of inner detachment, the lines of the distant cathedral and other beautiful buildings rising in the golden evening light, with an ominous sense of their remoteness.

Realizing nothing but that it was still too early, she wandered on. She wanted nothing from her room; it could all well be left behind. Her knees often began to tremble from hunger. She tried hard to reason out whether she should remove her name from her linen or not. If she did, no one who loved her would ever hear anything about her, whereas if she left it on, she would, even though dead, come once more under their loving glance and receive a tender burial. But such feelings only tended to obscure and weaken her former clear-eyed resolution, and at last she was forced to own that she had fallen a prey to that elemental power against which she had fought through all the days of her exile, by the exercise of every cunning artifice and relentless self-defence, viz. the onslaught of emotional hunger, made even fiercer by the additional spur of physical starvation.

The sky was aglow with gold and violet; swallows were calling to each other as they sailed through the soft air; whole rows of windows shone with the warm light of the

setting sun; children were playing in the street; lovers passing, deep in confidential talk. From the restaurants came the sound of gramophones and electric pianos. Overwhelmed with dismay, Alma began to run. "Now I am utterly ruined," she thought, "and must bury my despair in the water." Her heart gave a convulsive leap as though under the lash of a whip. But soon her strength failed, her speed slackened, until she stood with shaking knees, lost in sad meditation and self-abandonment, in front of an advertisement stand. In utter consternation she began, in the mechanical absent-mindedness of those desperate with misery, to read the notices before her eyes. The Winter Garden invited the public to the "phenomenal" feats of Chinese and Canadian performers; the theatre advertised its plays; courses of tango-dancing were notified, and American cinemas promised the very best of films.

But Alma had long ceased to see all this; in wide-eyed terror and amazement she was gazing at a flaming-red notice on which stood written: "ALMA, give some sign of life, or it will end badly," and underneath the initials E. F. It might or might not be meant for her. But the whole announcement had a touch of eager affection about it that surely could only come from him. Her heart stood still with fear lest that dear face should only mock her and suddenly disappear. She was reassured by hearing a pushing urchin at her side rattle out the notice in his loud, impertinent voice; this seemed to make her more certain of its reality.

She felt more justified now in her mental vision of that mass of flaming hair. She saw him laugh with that familiar little swaying movement, but then the smile changed to a sad, forsaken look—the very look that seemed to say, "Give some sign of life, or it will end badly." She would have given, she knew not what, to know for certain if the notice came from him and was

meant for her. And her eyes turned to it with a look of anxious inquiry. Then she caught sight of the trade-mark of a printing firm two streets beyond the Felgentreus' flat, and this seemed to put an end to further doubt. She stumbled on, weary, love-sick, starving, and wellnigh in despair. Excitement lent a strange metallic brilliance to her sunken eyes, and her lips fell apart in suffering and longing for home. After twenty steps, however, she stopped short and returned to the prophetic notice. There it was, unchanged, and with silent sobs she stumbled back in the direction from which she had come. She felt impelled to go to her room, to think over this happening in quiet and solitude, but in ten minutes' time she had changed her mind. With a growing desire for action, she made a sudden search for coins in her purse and hand-bag, found two stamps left, and hurried in a passion of impatience to the nearest post office, where she exchanged the stamps for a letter-card. Still crying, but struggling to regain sight and power of thought, she composed on this a letter to Clara.

DEAR CLARA (she wrote in crooked, untidy lines),

To-day I read a notice to Alma, signed E. F. If by any chance it should be him, I am living at No. 7, Marsilius Street, Gardenhouse No. 3, with a Frau Zille. But I am with child; he must be told. If it isn't him, no one must come near me, or I'll drown myself. Only I won't neglect any step, because it says if I do "it will end badly." For just now I am still at Marsilius Street, but later on I can't say. But no one need trouble to pay me a useless visit, not even you, Clara dear. I cannot bear it. I do hope all's well with you. Much love,

YOUR ALMA.

If it isn't him, don't tell him a single word.

She stuck down this letter and posted it. Then she returned home, told her landlady in passing that she had sent word to her relatives, and went to her room, intending to shut herself in for the rest of the evening, to endure the many-sided hunger that assailed her body and soul

alike. There she found, however, a plate with a meat-ball, some potato salad and two slices of bread; evidently the old woman had succumbed to another attack of her natural human kindness. But this sight proved too much for Alma's sorely tried self-control. After the old woman had spent some considerable time in vainly waiting outside for a word of thanks, and decided at last, in fresh annoyance at her lodger's persistent arrogance, to come in and fetch it herself, she found the tall girl had thrown herself down in convulsive grief on the rickety couch, that was barely able to hold up under such a weight of moral distress. The sight made her quite sad herself. She fancied it was due to the girl's fear of her relations, and she now regretted that she had driven her to such straits. "Come, now, can't you say something?" she muttered at first, and rubbed her long nose in some confusion. Then she began a little tentative consolation, and when she saw it was not resented, she made it a little more emphatic. She assured her that her relatives would give her every help they could, grew more and more eloquent, and announced indignantly that if they dared to come and show any of their sauce, she'd show them what old Zille could do. "When I take to talking, I tell you it makes its mark." At last she did manage to induce Alma to eat, and after this demonstration of love to her neighbour she stumped thoughtfully back to her kitchen again. However things might turn out, she had never had such "to-dos" with any of her "room-ladies" before, and, as is well known, nothing cements the bonds of union so well as these.

That evening Alma made great preparations. To begin with, she felt it necessary to have a thorough wash from head to foot, following it up by a specially good shampoo. Whilst her hair was drying, she looked through her dresses, blouses, and underclothes with an expression of anxious disapproval. The rest of the evening she sat busy

with needle and scissors, and, as late as ten o'clock, she heated the heavy flat-iron and put it to good use. At eleven she began a sudden wash of blouses, and when she had done all that was humanly possible for that day, it was long after midnight, and she herself in such a state of despondent despair that she wished she had never been born. Life seemed complicated and disappointing in every respect. If a home with Felgentreu should really fall to her lot, she made up her mind to be very gentle and modest in her demands.

In spite of all this, the old woman was astounded next morning when Alma again appeared on the scene, for there stood almost the same smart young woman who had arrived on that earlier day straight from the care of her family, only that now everything about her was ampler and bolder and less insignificant. A hint of her approaching motherhood lay in her eyes, illumined by the light of expectation: she was awaiting not only her lover, but the father of her child. Her hair was once more carefully brushed and arranged, and that, too, in the latest style. She held herself almost as well as ever, and not without a certain *joie de vivre*. Her brow was unruffled and showed no impatience in her excitement.

The old landlady, too, was in festive mood. In honour of the day she actually wore her placket-hole at the back for once, instead of on her hip, as usual, and proposed to make a proper toilet in the course of the morning. She was unwearying in commendation and praise to her lodger, and not only gave her honey with her morning coffee, but about ten o'clock rapped at the door with Alma's lunch, supplemented by the addition of some slices of cold meat; for dinner she provided the girl's favourite dish, potato-fritters and coffee, the fritters hot and shining with fat straight from the pan. Again she was full of inquiries, but all she got was a half-laughing, half-troubled answer of, "Ask no questions and you'll hear

no lies!" Now, whether it was the result of too much strong coffee or the invigorating effect of the fritter, at any rate Alma's heart was soon beating far too fast, and, as if in reflection of some hidden fire, her cheeks showed a pink flush, which made her so pretty that the old woman became quite overcome by affection. "Keep like that and nobody will look at you dry-eyed. Will it be your father or your lover who's coming, eh?"

"That's what I wonder," said Alma, with growing uneasiness. But she had scarcely closed her lips when the bell rang outside. She listened eagerly, and met the old woman's look with an inquiring glance.

"Is that him?" the old woman teased with her head on one side and a touching smile all ready beforehand. Alma gave no answer, however, but instead a slow pallor crept over her face.

Her landlady got up to see who it was, and Alma rose quickly, too, and went to her room, where she sat down on the sofa to wait in dumb suspense. Soon she heard the old woman returning and talking to someone in excited and important tones; to judge from the step, this someone was a man. "Well, well," she heard; "she was here a minute ago; no doubt she has run away into her room. Poor but honest we are here, that I must tell you. We live together like two turtle-doves. I'll just rap on the door." And this she did, at the same time exclaiming: "Fräulein Klamme, someone's come now. Can I open for the gentleman?" As she spoke, she did so, and almost at the same instant a tall, manly form, with flaming hair, appeared in the doorway. His honest brown eyes gave a quick glance round and then fixed an eager gaze on Alma. He was pale, and had apparently grown thinner, but, in spite of that and a worried look on his face, he was now laughing.

"There, then, now we've got you again!" His voice betrayed his satisfaction and deep affection as he stretched out his hand and moved towards her in greater agitation

than he cared to show. Old Zille could not see whether, or how far, Alma was upset as well. She looked towards him in motionless expectation, but her eyes expressed more sadness than joy. Perhaps she breathed more quickly, but her cheeks grew paler, although, quite unconsciously, she looked more womanly, and the old woman was quite right in her surmise that the one person to win the day here would be Alma. At the moment that was all of which she could be certain, since before her "room-lady" would have anything to do with her visitor, she said too plainly to permit any possible misunderstanding: "Please shut the door, Frau Zille," with the evident additional meaning of "from the outside"; and this caution and determination did not fail to make an impression upon her. She shut the door obediently, almost respectfully indeed, but stayed by it with no less determination on her own part to lose nothing that could be seen or heard by means of a keyhole. For some time it was only the man who spoke now and again without receiving any reply, and whose words were quite unintelligible to the eager listener. Then he seemed to sit down beside the girl—at any rate, the sofa creaked as under an additional weight. Then his remarks came to a full-stop, nor could she hear any kissing, although she could imagine no other occupation in the silent pause that followed. At last she heard the girl utter a cry that almost made her faint, and the man's answer told her all there was to know. With trembling limbs and quite upset, she crept back into her little hole of a kitchen, where she sat for a long time with a palpitating heart, drinking her lonely cup of coffee as she meditated on the love episodes in her own life. From time to time the cup in her trembling fingers clattered against the saucer, and now and again she gave a desolate cough. At last she fell asleep from sheer weakness; she had felt the strain of this business, at any rate, more than either of the other two.

After an hour's time they made their appearance again, all ready to depart. In the twinkling of an eye Frau Zille had regained her spirits and was quite on the spot; she came running out of her den, like some grey antediluvian apparition, eager to see what was going on, and urged them to take a cup of coffee; surely they wouldn't hurt her by a refusal. She rubbed her proboscis in her zealous hospitality, and, as she gave her eager invitation, displayed the two yellow tusks in the slit that represented her mouth. But Felgentreu had his instructions from Alma. He declined, with his usual frank laugh, and said they must catch the train or they wouldn't get home that night. He also asked for the bill, so that he might settle it at once. Alma had said something about debts. The old woman did not seem pleased to hear this—indeed, she refused to give it, and said that could be settled any time by post. If he would just give her the address she would bring the account over some time. In any case she meant to visit the young lady in her new surroundings, such good friends as they had been. Felgentreu, however, declared somewhat emphatically that she would never see a farthing of his money if she didn't state the amount without a moment's further delay. She was clever enough to see that there was no desire to keep up the connection and that Alma already ruled him, so she hastened to mention the sum with as innocent a face as possible.

"But it was not so much just now," Alma remarked at once. "However, I suppose you are trying to put up the price for us as fast as you can?" With a matronly air, that in its novelty sat comically on her and seemed a little unnatural, she opened her handbag and produced the scrap of paper that the old woman had once put on her plate. "This is ten marks less, Frau Zille."

"Just so—just so," she quickly agreed, with an innocent laugh. "If you have the bill, why do you keep on asking

ne for it? I can't keep it always exactly in my head. I tell you," she turned to Felgentreu, who was looking in his pocket-book, "I never met anything so exact and proper all the time I've let rooms. And always living so retired—why, it's almost unnatural. You may be proud of such faithful love."

"Well, I don't know that it's so very unnatural," he replied, with a laugh.

"Oh, but it is, sir! How often I've had to look at your photograph with her. Such a handsome man! But why have you run away from him, then? I used to say. There was never any answer, you may guess—but wet pillows in the morning and red eyes. Ah, these young ladies now!"

He handed her the exact sum due, and she took it with a sigh.

"Since you have been such a companion to my Alma, and helped her, you shall have a picture of us both," he said good-naturedly, "and here's something to buy yourself a bottle of wine to drink our health." He added another thaler, not noticing Alma's expression of disapproval. "Her loneliness is over now," he continued, with an affectionate glance at the girl he loved. "But I think she has changed a little, don't you?" he went on inquiringly.

The old woman eagerly accepted and acclaimed this conclusion, as if it embodied the highest wisdom of the East, in the vague hope that perhaps something more would come her way; but the vulgarity, dirt, and general sordidness of the place suddenly got on Alma's nerves, and she urged their departure. She was half-ashamed, half-furious, and scarcely vouchsafed a glance as she took leave of her landlady. The latter talked and curtsied until the two had left the flat, and kept her babbling up from the head of the stairs long after they were out of earshot; then she rubbed her nose as if awaking from a dream, wrinkled her forehead in disappointed annoyance, and, with a shake of her head, retreated into her den.

CHAPTER XVII

THE new home was fresh and sunny. There were pretty curtains at the windows; the kitchen contained all that was necessary to begin with, and there were carpets where carpets were required.

In fact, nothing was wanting, not even the broom behind the door or the watch-stand on the table by the bed; the only flaw was that Alma did not seem so frankly happy as Felgentreu was, but that was a serious flaw indeed. It was not love that was wanting. After she had lain in his arms she had belonged to him with heart and soul alike—indeed, he so charmed and possessed her that she was only half-alive throughout her days, and conscious of nothing but her longing for him. In the evenings and nights with Emil she found complete compensation for all she had gone through on his account, but he was not able to dispel her bad dreams as regarded Meta. These, indeed, quickly developed into absolute pain, and since when she suffered she always did so intensely, he had no easy time with her at first. In her absolute surrender he sometimes sensed the hidden pain that throbbed behind it, and through all her passion of love he now and again caught sight of a little flash of fear. This disturbed him greatly and cast a slight shadow over his happiness—in fact, it served perhaps to beautify the landscape of his manly love with a touch of gentle mystery. It was useless to question her; she would own to nothing. But chance utterances, or timid silence, gave him a clue, and he understood. He used to bring her flowers and talk to her about all his affairs, treating her in every way like his real and lawful wife, but, to his grief, he found he was faced by the first of those cases when a husband or wife can do nothing but stand by and wait, unable to give real help in the inner contests of the other.

Thus, whilst Alma soon began to recover from the physical ills resulting from her time of exile in the east of the city, her heart remained oppressed and terrified. The brooding depths in her eyes did not disappear; she would spend hours of her solitary days in sad musing, sometimes even in tears. Emil, in his artless way, had put a photograph of Meta on the sideboard. Sometimes Alma would look at it for hours together, at other times she would creep past timidly without even a glance in its direction. She could not believe that any man could leave such a wife for ever, and when she thought of what she had taken from Meta and now kept for herself, her ingratitude to her foster-mother seemed so black that she hated herself, and would, in her cowardice and anger, have run away again if the thought of her child, and the mental lethargy that was, moreover, already beginning to overwhelm her, had not deterred her from such a step.

But imperceptibly she began to give way where she had no power of resistance, cowardice and jealousy giving her many a bad time of which Emil knew nothing. Even Clara's affectionate society—her friend had resumed her old attitude of affection and respect under the new conditions without a moment's hesitation—was powerless to comfort her.

Indeed, when she recognized Clara's new and boundless admiration of Felgentreu, Alma began to treat her with more reserve. But one evening, when Felgentreu came home and found her quite overcome by a fit of uncontrollable sobs—a welcome she had hitherto been most anxious not to give him—and even after he had at last found out the cause, it was long before he succeeded in calming her. He began to think her emotional distress was connected with her physical condition, and did but love her the more. But what she told him made a lasting impression, and for many days he went about pondering uneasily on the forces and impulses of human nature.

It had to do with the following incident. Alma had been making coffee when the bell rang; she thought it was Clara, and as her depression happened not to be worrying her so much that day, she went with real pleasure to open the door. "One moment!" she cried gaily through the open kitchen door, hastily took the milk off the fire, and ran to the front-door. To her utter surprise she was confronted, not by the gay friend she expected, but by Meta's staid form. She was so amazed and taken aback that at first she could only stare at her in motionless silence, except for the wild beating of her heart and the stirring of her child beneath it; she never afterwards forgot that this was its first movement. Meta watched her attentively as she allowed her a little time to regain her self-possession, and said at last, in much less hostile tones than Alma had expected:

"Won't you let me in? We can't talk very well out here."

Shocked at her neglect, Alma moved aside and Meta stepped in. She held herself almost as upright as ever, but gave a general impression of having aged. The lines round her mouth were more pronounced, and on her temples Alma noticed grey threads that had not been there before. All this so oppressed her heart and gave her such a feeling of suffocation that she was still unable to say a single word. Half stupefied, she followed Meta into the flat with only the one consoling thought in her mind: that she knew it was in perfect order. Meta cast an almost imperceptible glance round, with one eye taking in the kitchen, with the other the general arrangement of the flat, and then sat down by the window on the chair offered by Alma, who was still pale and speechless.

"Well, that's what your home is like," she observed, with a shade more sympathy in her voice and again fixing her big grey eyes inquiringly on Alma. "Very pretty, too. You have taken a great deal of trouble with it.

That I should expect. Well, your kettle is boiling. Let us have our coffee soon—or weren't you thinking of offering me anything?" she asked, with a half-smile. "Here, I've brought a little of the quince jelly you were always so fond of." She drew a glass jar out of her large satchel. "You won't have been able to make any jam yet, and home-made is so much nicer than bought. But run along now; the kettle's steaming like a volcano and you're wasting the gas." Alma seemed at first disposed to give up all effort at self-control and to let herself go entirely; then it looked as if she wanted to ward off something, and did not know how to begin. But Meta was so calm, and drove her to the kitchen in such concern about the waste of gas, that she meekly took the glass of quince jelly. Then in her embarrassment she again raised her hand to put back from her forehead the hair that was not there, and after looking round the room with unseeing eyes, she departed, still without having uttered a sound. Meta remained by herself, her first favourable impression evidently increasing as she sat there deep in thought. "After all, she's made of good stuff," she assented. "Nowadays all the young folk are slaves to their passions. And he—well, God help them both!" She sat for a long time gazing thoughtfully into space, whilst it was so strangely quiet in the kitchen that she cast an expectant glance in the direction of the door. "She will have put on more water," she said to herself, "and perhaps she is having out her little cry before she comes back."

The truth of her supposition was quite evident when Alma reappeared with the cups and all that was needed, but Meta gave no sign of noticing it. She at once began again to talk about housekeeping matters, praised the arrangement of the curtains, although it was not the same as hers, admired the tick of the clock on the wall, and inquired if Alma found she could get all she wanted close at hand. Alma said "Yes," and that was the first

word she had uttered. Meanwhile she poured out and did the honours, as she had been taught by Meta, who was now the guest and accepted all her attentions. As long as the meal lasted she was careful to avoid all agitating topics. But when she had praised the coffee and a pleasant atmosphere had been established, she was anxious to put Alma out of her present state of suspense, and so came at once to the object of her visit. The sun at that moment sent a happy gleam through the open window.

"Well, so here you are, then, living happily with one another!" she said, with firm gravity. "He is easy to get on with, and you know how to manage a house well, which is the secret of half life's happiness. Only one thing I cannot understand, Alma: your position is quite opposed to religion and to all social laws. Why don't you two talk to me about a proper separation, since things are as they are with you? Why don't I ever hear anything at all from you either? Am I such an inhuman creature? But perhaps you are so pleased with your present relationship that you feel no desire to conform to the usage of Christian civilization? Tell me what you feel about it, Alma; you are now an independent woman, and have another gift which was never granted me, so you don't need to be too timid about expressing your opinions." A little pause followed, whilst Alma made great efforts to find some sort of answer that would satisfy her foster-mother.

"I have not many opinions," she said at last doubtfully, in faltering accents. "We—we see everything as well. Many a night it has kept me awake," she suddenly confessed, her mood quickly changing to one of uneasy gloom, and against her will she laid bare the hidden secrets of her heart. "I fret so much that I am no pleasant companion for him. And then he frets about me, and grows sad and uneasy. No, no; never think we don't feel oppressed by our sin. But what's the good of that?" she asked, already on the defensive, as she frowned and lifted

her eyes to Meta. "If it's one's fate, then it is, and just has to be borne."

She stopped, and Meta too was silent as she meditated over what she had heard.

"Without love you will have a difficult time," she said thoughtfully. "You haven't said a word about that, only talked about fate and suchlike. Do you sometimes have a night when you can't sleep for sheer love? Well, then, all the other difficulties will be solved. You needn't blush; you have gone through enough to know now what destiny means. But come, there's one thing you must clear up for me to-day. What happened that Sunday? You wanted, first of all, didn't you? to go to church with me. Then you said you would like to visit Frau Lippke. But you didn't go to the Lippkes either. Why not? And why did you go home instead? It wasn't a plot arranged beforehand—that I know. But what was it?"

"Something came over me," said Alma gloomily. "At first—well, I was glad to avoid him, and then I wanted to save myself altogether from him by going to the Lippkes. Afterwards I was anxious to pay them just a last visit there, but in the end I felt a horror of them. When I saw I couldn't act as you wished in any way, I ran home in desperation because he was there. So I fell into his hands, after all, and then it was all over with me."

Frau Felgentreu nodded.

"I always thought that possibly I had hurried you with that Julius. Mark this, Alma: whoever fights to hold tight what he thinks is his will lose it in the end. Felgentreu told me that same afternoon when he came home from his fruitless search. There's nothing false about the man, whatever he may do. Well, and now there's that other question. Why don't you ask me for a divorce? Is he against it?"

"We have never spoken about it," Alma said evasively and with secret alarm. "How could we, then? We couldn't possibly ask such a thing from you!"

"What do you mean? You couldn't ask it of me? But you can ask me to let you go on living in this illicit union whilst I remain in a dubious position myself? Emil—well, he doesn't think about it; it never occurs to him, but you—you will soon be a mother. What will be your position with the child? You surely want a decent life, respected by your fellows! Well, then!"

For some moments she looked reproachfully at Alma's bowed head.

"I have charge of Felgentreu's savings," she continued, with a change of tone—"that is, 15,000 marks with all the interest. You know the arrangement about this money? Very well; we spoke about it that Sunday, and I refused to let it be drawn out until you were back and we could all talk it over together. You came back, but not to me. And he is so proud of his independence that he doesn't ask a word about the money, and simply leaves it in my hands. Now you have to pay for this flat for many a month yet. And then the children will come; they will not stop with only one. Now listen to me. I am anxious to secure your future and that of your children. I will not keep his money, not even to take care of it only. Moreover, his clothes and other things are still in my flat. When you bring me your answer, you can take them all back with you, so that I may get my rooms neat and tidy at last. If you will undertake to ask him for the control of the 15,000 marks, which will simply pass from my hands to yours, there will be nothing to prevent a legal divorce. I shall sue him for unfaithfulness, since legal forms must be observed. No names must be mentioned, or the court will forbid your marriage. What sense there is in that I cannot see, but there is no sense in lots of conditions that still are kept up. There, now you know how things are, and can turn it all over in your mind. You have some idea of money and property and know how to calculate." Meta rose. "Thank you for your welcome and hospi-

tality. Your home is just as it should be. It is nice that it gets so much sun, too. He would see to that, for he's really a southerner. In November, and then when it gets cold, he always has a few terribly miserable days until he gets used to it."

On the threshold Meta again touched on the savings topic. "You will perhaps find it a little difficult to make that proposal to him, but he is your husband now, and this will give me a chance of seeing what influence you have over him. Marriage is no game, and yet, in certain points, it is more enjoyable than the pleasantest of games. Well, God bless you, Alma. I now retire to my rôle as dowager. Make me a happy grandmother, will you? Good-bye."

Alma was again unable to say a single word in reply to all this, nor did Meta require it. The young woman was just as pale and dumb when she parted from her grave-faced foster-mother as when she had seen her come. Meta went down the stairs with the deliberation of an older woman, into which she had been changed by the events of the last few months, and Alma re-entered the flat in a general state of mingled depression and terror.

Felgentreu, as it appeared, had privately expected some act of generosity on the part of Meta, but on this occasion he could not quite understand why it should so affect Alma, as she said not a word to him of Meta's stipulation: that the custody of the money should pass from her hands to those of his present wife. She shrank from this fact with all the timidity and painful reverence which she still felt for Felgentreu; also, from this day on, she felt that mysterious power over her life which led her irresistibly step by step deeper into an ever-present moral difficulty. This difficulty had not always existed for her. It had been brought into her life, or Alma had strayed into it as into a trap, set, however, for her alone. Felgentreu passed along his irresponsible path quite untroubled, whilst as

though carried on by a threatening and mystic storm, descending from Meta's spiritual heights, there fell on her a heavy weight of responsibility, already limiting her freedom of action, however much she might struggle to resist. The form she had once so revered and now so dreaded seemed ever more admonishing, until she already began to realize, with a sense of repulsion, the true nature of the inheritance that she had taken out of Meta's hands into her own.

"You see, she was always a strong character," Felgentreu meantime suggested, as he walked thoughtfully up and down. "She lives her own life, now and again chancing to walk part of the way in others' company or to give them a grave 'Good morning' in passing. What did you answer her, Alma, child—eh?"

"Nothing!" she said morosely. "I didn't utter a word. What could I say to her?"

He nodded.

"I'll tell you what, Alma; I put this divorce business into your hands. I am a man and don't bother about all the nonsense. You see, I am at the works all day, and in the evening nobody will dare to interfere in my private affairs. But you're a woman and meet other women. They gossip amongst themselves, and let you notice and feel what they think about it all. If you'd rather have it, say so; we're no longer children. And what you decide shall be done."

After that he began to go out with her more, to distract her thoughts a little. They discovered they both had a keen liking for expeditions and active change, and she had to endure no more Sundays at home. Revisiting all the haunts of her childhood, she led him back to former habits. To-day they would go to Grünau; a week later to Johannisthal; then to Chorin, where the old Mark monastery ruins stand as a reminder of the past; to Nauen, to see the fresh developments; then to Wannsee,

to enjoy the "life" in this family bathing-place; once they went with a great crowd for a sail down the Spree, and thus nearly two months of these country excursions passed without making much change in Alma. She could not renew her youthful life, and she shrank from that which the present offered her. On the eighth Sunday the morning post brought her a letter from Meta, which ran as follows:

DEAR ALMA,

It is now two months since I came to see you. I wasn't really prepared to wait any longer than that. Apparently you cannot come to any decision. I do not blame you for that—indeed, am better pleased than if you had shown great powers of calculation and got him under your thumb. So now I will make a new proposal. Yesterday I began simple divorce proceedings against Emil, without raising any other issues, which I shall settle at another time. Since you insist on keeping to yourselves, I must take my own measures. Keep happy and get on honourably. I let few days pass without praying for you. My lawyer says that the agreement about the savings is still binding unless Felgentreu sues for the money by law. I shall wait for that. Also I have altered my will, revoking the legacy to you, and leaving most of the inheritance to be equally divided amongst your children. If you speak of me, do not forget that all this world's sorrows end when this life is over. I have moved from my flat and handed all his things over to Emil. God keep us all! He will wipe away all tears from our eyes. Amen. As always,

YOUR META.

As Felgentreu was in the room there was nothing to be done but to hand him this letter. He read it, and stood some time in thoughtful surprise, whilst Alma, deeply moved, finished laying the Sunday breakfast. She had got rolls and honey, to which he had added some smoked salmon; little by little he was yielding to a certain love of luxury which Meta had kept in restraint so long. By the side of the salmon there was fine Dutch cheese, and their Sunday coffee was a better kind, only found, as a rule, on a rich man's table. For their second morning meal he intended to have uncooked mince seasoned with salt,

pepper and onions, and a small glass of southern wine. The dinner was of his providing, too: a golden fat roast fowl, accompanied by very fine white salted potatoes and salad; as a good Prussian, he was very partial to potatoes in any shape or form. And he meant to have wine for dinner, too. In the afternoon Clara was invited to coffee, and Alma had a cake all ready, so they didn't live so badly in these early days of their conjugal life. Contrary to her own expectations, Alma shared in all the "extravagance" with hidden delight; so far their savings had been nil.

"Well I never!" Felgentreu exclaimed in amazement. "There you've been bowed down with a secret. You didn't want to act as my guardian. Oh, you women! you women! But one thing you must own: I knew you better than Meta did. I'll tell you what. To-morrow you get on your walking-dress and return her call. That will put us all more at ease."

But Alma shook her head. She was by no means at her ease, and saw no prospect of ever being so. The control for her of 15,000 marks had receded to an immeasurable distance—by her own fault, as she said to herself—and this she could only consider bitterly as an additional personal grief.

"No, no!" she hastily exclaimed, in secret fear, "not that." And in a tone of entreaty she added: "I cannot do it! Don't force me!"

Her eyes burned with the flame of bitter remorse mingled with the sad suffering of helpless jealousy kindled by the great esteem which he so plainly showed, quite as a matter of course even now as in earlier times, for the woman whom Alma still considered as his "lawful wife." He recognized her dilemma and gave up his idea.

"Then—there's no point, of course, in forcing you," he assented, with a shade of disappointment in his voice. "Liberty is the mother of all good. In that case, I'll write

to her myself. You see, when all's said and done, she's lonely and has done us no harm." She listened in gloomy silence, and he went on with friendly talk about further plans for the future. "Then I suppose the wedding will be at midsummer," he suggested, his innocent eyes showing not the slightest consciousness of any sense of guilt. "Look here, I'll get leave of absence for two days, Friday and Saturday, so that we can have three clear days' holiday. Life must have a little brightness now and again. In the course of the year we must copy the Catholics, and set up a chapel at every cross-road, where we can listen to the call of memory and bring our offering of flowers. God protect you, my heart, and keep us long together. Now you can look forward to the future with a lighter heart."

Her heart, indeed, seemed frozen, but to please him she tried to look relieved, and was so lively and talkative as they drank their coffee that Emil glanced at her in astonished inquiry. This sudden outburst of superficial gaiety attracted his passing attention. For a moment she seemed a young woman like all others of her class, but before Emil could consider her in this light, she was again under the spell of that timidity—inspired by the sight of his higher standards of life and love, to which she was still unaccustomed—which made her "different," and raised her above the ordinary run in his sight, since it exercised a restraining influence on the spontaneous expression of her natural impulses. A little later she sat somewhat shyly on his knee, taking her breakfast from his hand. But at dinner his capacity for enjoyment so encouraged her appetite that they finished almost the whole fowl between them, and she also drank enough wine to go to her head. Afterwards she slept in all childlike confidence at his side until the time for afternoon coffee, and at last welcomed Clara with flushed cheeks and something very like the old limpid brightness in her eyes.

Clara had a somewhat tired and yearning look about her as she embraced and kissed her friend with all her usual affectionate admiration and inquired after her well-being with what Alma to-day considered quite unnecessary sympathy. "What a lot of questions you always ask!" she answered casually and with such a touch of sharpness in her voice that Felgentreu, in the bedroom, took up the cudgels for Clara and called out: "Come, come, Alma, you be nice to my little friend. We couldn't inquire after you for so long that now we have to make up for lost time." But the long pent-up pride of life had to find an outlet; in any case, she had never felt much dissimulation necessary with her orphaned and less favoured friend, who had often had to put up with something from Alma's ebullitions of youthful health and strength. Clara was accustomed to it, so with no sense of offence she again praised the flat as well as Alma's good taste and skill, and when Felgentreu appeared she ran to meet him with enthusiastic respect—almost fell on his neck, indeed. Then in sudden discomfiture she turned and glanced at her friend, who was putting the last touches to the coffee-table with a somewhat lowering brow. Clara's weakness for Emil was an open secret between the two lovers and one of the chief items in Alma's repertoire.

"Well, how is everything at home, Clara?" Felgentreu asked. "Heaven knows how long it is since I spoke to your father. I've scarcely even seen him! I wonder if you know," he went on, with a smile, "what I could do to give the old man pleasure?"

Clara obediently pondered the question, but could think of nothing, nor was her report a favourable one in other respects. Since her mother's death nothing had gone right at home. The old man had taken to drink. He always had a bottle of *Kornschnaps*¹ handy in his pocket

¹ *Kornschnaps*—cheap inferior spirit in common use in Germany.

great deal of laughter. Finally she sat on the couch, very busy with her cigarette, and Alma at her side, whilst Felgentreu tramped up and down the carpet holding forth in his usual fashion. It had suddenly struck him that Alma was not talking, and when he looked at her more closely, he was troubled to see she was plainly depressed by Clara's report. Although he then showed great skill in bringing forth treasures new and old in his present oration, and succeeded in giving Clara the greatest delight, he utterly failed to dissipate Alma's melancholy. She remained silent and self-absorbed. She felt as if the hand of fate had gripped her from the other side, and for the first time she was almost annoyed with these Lippke folk, who would not leave her in peace. She seemed to see the dead coming like some threatening wraith to avenge the wrong she had done, and shuddered in lonely terror amid all the talk and laughter going on around her; for meantime Felgentreu had succeeded at the very last moment in preventing Clara from burning a hole in her frock with her cigarette. And further, to have it all settled at once, he had bespoken her services as witness of their marriage and godmother at the christening, reserving to himself the liberty of reversing the usual sequence of these ceremonies, should circumstances require it. Filled with the keenest interest, and as happy and cheerful as if these happy events were part of her own future instead of her friend's, Clara departed in all haste to prepare her father's supper.

Afterwards Felgentreu tried to have a proper confidential discussion of her news, so that Alma might have the relief of saying what she felt, but she would not respond, and at last took refuge in absolute silence, as she sat, full of uneasy thoughts, seeing ghosts in the rays of the setting sun, and only half hearing what Emil was saying. He proposed to stop old Lippke during the next few days, suggested their simply going to his flat on the following

Sunday to have a plain talk about everything, and was emphasizing the marvellous effect of taking the bull by the horns under certain circumstances when Alma got up suddenly with a request for a walk. Emil at once saw the reasonableness of this suggestion and agreed. Not without some pleasurable anticipation of an evening's enjoyment, he took his hat and stick, not the silver-handled one that had been left at Meta's, but a new yellow one with the round handle that was then so fashionable; and Alma, with much the same end in view, put on her pretty red hat (all the garments of her girlhood were still hanging in Meta's wardrobe), took her sunshade—Emil was already carrying her dustcoat in case the evening should be chilly—and went down the staircase with the help of his arm.

The evening was warm, even if overclouded; the weather forecast had predicted a tendency to stormy weather, and this prediction was quite correct, although so far the tendency had not developed into anything of a more definite nature. Felgentreu seemed to have one of his special inspirations to-day, and one which he no longer tried to restrain. He had scarcely set foot in the zoological gardens and caught sight of elephants than he began one of his generalizations:

"These elephants, look at them now! Who do they remind you of?" he began in amazement; and as, still hanging on his arm, she replied that she did not know, in a tone that plainly showed her lack of interest—since her mind was entirely occupied with appreciation of his manliness and care for her—he continued thoughtfully: "Why, the German nation. Notice, now, the elephant is big and fine-looking, clever and tractable, with a thick skin and at the same time a sensitive nature. He has his fancies, too, stands on such mighty legs and yet treads so softly and cautiously. But he is easily roused and then tramples all beneath his feet, stretches out his trunk to

every quarter of the globe, is the strongest and most intellectual creature, yet we kill him in pits with elephant-shot. It always makes me melancholy to see the big, simple creature behind iron bars."

He had also plenty to say, too, about the porpoise colony. He could not understand why they took no notice of the beautiful gates and fences; instead of going through the cleverly-made passages, they simply followed their noses and swam clean over their dwellings, somewhat to Emil's indignation. "They just don't use them," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Either let them go their own way or put the fences higher. But then they'd get under in their determination not to go through anything." He went on to speak of the characters represented by the animals, and was much interested in the various ways in which these were shown. "What do you think, Alma?" he asked. "Do the animals have any idea what they are like? Look at the goats, for instance, full of curiosity and independence—clever creatures. Monkeys, too, have the same curiosity and independence, and maybe are even cleverer, but there again the character is quite different, less refined, commoner, meaner. It is clear at once that they are nearer human beings. Do you hear the cry of the roe-deer, with its note of some strange power unknown to us? And then notice again; there are exotic creatures on the one hand and continental animals on the other—monkeys, tigers, lions, crocodiles, panthers and the rest—all living on the brink of the great oceans, a cruel, shameless, thieving lot. Then take the ox, the camel, the creatures with cloven hoofs and cud-chewers; the elephant, too—those are beasts of the solid land, with something melancholy and helpless about them. Apparently life on a continent makes one sad and full of fancies."

The tower in the gardens suggested the idea of climbing up to look at Berlin under the setting sun. Alma agreed, and they mounted the winding iron stair. Once at the top,

a great sight lay spread before their eyes. The city extended farther than eye could reach, and its outlines faded away on the misty horizon, as if it stretched on over endless land and water. On every side towers and chimneys shone in the golden evening light that lit up the roofs of whole streets of houses. In between the many-storied buildings lay the dark heat of many an ill-defined abyss, threatening chasms of melancholy, vast deserts of loneliness, such as can only be found in a northern capital. Here, quite close, lay the Emperor William's massive memorial church with its five towers, the highest of them cutting across the horizon bounding the great city as it faded away in the golden distance. From its heights a bell began to chime for evening service, whilst at its foot surged the Sunday traffic of returning travellers and merry-makers starting out for their evening's amusement.

Felgentreu grew silent as he looked and listened; such silence meant a good deal in him to-day. He only once suddenly exclaimed: "I tell you, Alma, to have one's roots here is no trifle. There is something in this mighty depth of streets and houses. I wouldn't live anywhere else, not if you made me Emperor of Switzerland or even of India!"

A little weary with all she had seen and heard, Alma expressed a desire for rest, and Felgentreu led her towards the restaurant. They passed lakes overshadowed by weeping-willows, with foreign ducks and swans floating on their peaceful waters. Others were spanned by graceful bridges, others again were covered with the leaves of water-lilies, although their flowering season was over. The louder tones of the military band were proof at last that they were close to the refreshment-rooms. They sat down by the water, and on the shore quite close to them stood two flamingos motionless and absorbed in their mutual love. Emil succeeded in getting a waiter to take

his order of pickled pork for himself and the ham sandwiches that Alma preferred, and whilst waiting he occupied himself with a great glass of Bavarian beer. The military band struck up again with a selection from *Lohengrin*. Felgentreu only heard with satisfaction that they were playing something of Wagner's. The notes of the music were interspersed with the roars of the lions in the wild-beast house, and now and again with the cries of the water-fowl. It was warm, but not oppressive. The last clouds sailed across the eastern sky in the evening afterglow. Their part of the gardens was lit up everywhere by electric lamps surrounded by dancing midges, and bats passed rapidly by in their zigzag flight. At hundreds of tables there were seated Berlin citizens, with their wives or other female acquaintances, listening to the music with the same rapt attention as Felgentreu.

The latter was in a state of utter content. He was firmly convinced that, as far as social life was concerned, Berlin could well hold her own with Paris, London, or New York, and he was conscious of a natural and agreeable sense of satisfaction in the fact that he was a native of a great European capital, and that capital Berlin. Also he had again been successful in rescuing his beautiful love out of her Slough of Despond. She had laughed and chatted once more, leant against his side, looked at him with love-lit eyes, and, just lately, had shown altogether a keener interest in his thoughts and feelings. And a crowning touch to his pleasure was the melody of the pathetic music, which acted on him like a narcotic and so quickened his pulses that he unreservedly approved of life and hoped for many more such days to come. But when he turned a somewhat dreamy look of mingled love and happiness upon the darling of his heart, he found her again weeping, silently indeed, but with uncontrollable grief, and her whole body plainly shaken by cruel and discordant anguish. "Come, come, Alma dear!" he said

in utter surprise, as he took her hand. "What is it, then?" But she could not tell him that she saw grim spectres on one hand, and on the other hand felt herself threatened by a blessed spirit, for such Meta now was in her estimation. She even pulled her hand out of his and turned aside her face, so that anyone looking at them might have thought they were quarrelling. It was not till the music ceased that she regained a little self-control, since they were in a public place. She applied her handkerchief vigorously both to nose and eyes, but she gave an almost violent negative when Felgentreu proposed going home, and urged him rather to go to some other entertainment. With a troubled glance, which Alma, however, avoided, he said, "No doubt the music was too exciting for you," and suggested a cinema, but that was too dull, so he took her by train to the city.

The reaction after her nervous attack now made her a little too noisy and demonstrative, and the way in which she hung on the tall man's arm in the Underground and sought refuge in their mutual affection was almost as much ostentation as real need of protection. He responded to nearly all demands, petted and looked after her like a child, and considerately provided her with opportunities to satisfy her uncontrollable, almost hysterical, desire to laugh. He took her to the Admiral's Palace, where there were fairy-like winter nights and skating parties on a sheet of artificial ice; but again he surprised those depths of gloom in her eyes, try as she might to cover them with a laugh and a blush. In something like desperation he decided to make another move, and, seeing that the only effective cure now would be some quite unusual excitement, he went off with her, just as they were, to the so-called *Palais de danse*.

Nor was he disappointed in the result. Alma watched with keenest interest the favourite cocottes in their Charleston and other nigger dances introduced from

America; admired their dresses and such parts of their bodies as these dresses did not cover; their hair, hats, shoes; revelled in the voluptuous scent and brightness meeting her on every side. The champagne that Felgentreu ordered, in accordance with the usual custom there, ran through her veins like fragrant fire. The men that looked at her from time to time; the ladies that followed Emil with their eyes; the silk, powder, dress-coats, rouge, the soothing music and subdued light—all these exercised an alluring charm, satisfied her thirst for sensation, excited her senses. At last he brought her home in a motor, calm, but filled with devotion as passionate as ever, and she ended her day by an ecstasy of love in his arms, where she was suddenly overcome by a slumber that kept her motionless as death in that warm embrace until next morning, and even longer still, until he knew not when; for meantime he crept out of bed without having once closed his eyes, dressed quietly, made his coffee in the kitchen, and, somewhat weary after his wakeful night, left the house without a sound to go to his daily work. And Alma heard nothing of it all.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON the first of the next month, when old Lippke returned from his night's work, he noticed that his son's hat was still hanging in the entrance, although at this hour Julius was, as a rule, already on his way to the chemist's shop. The old man thought he must have overslept, so, in case he had, he rapped at his door and called out the time. When he did not come to breakfast, however, his father grew anxious and sent Clara to his room; she came back with the news that he was not well. That gave the old man food for thought, and he ended by going to Julius himself to get the shop's telephone number, so

that Clara could send the requisite message. When she did so she fancied they answered her with a little surprise, but this she did not mention. A little later Julius got up and drank his coffee, but it was impossible either to see, or to get out of him, what was really wrong. He spent the whole day wandering about or sitting absolutely idle, attacked his father's brandy bottle, and went to bed early, half-intoxicated.

On the next morning the same thing occurred. Again Clara had to telephone, and again it struck her that they thought it strange. But on the fourth day his masters were evidently bored with the proceeding, for they told Clara she need not trouble any further, as Herr Lippke was no longer in their employ; they had given him the usual four weeks' notice on the first day of the last month. Old Lippke received this information in somewhat shocked silence, and, contrary to his usual custom, he did not go to bed directly after breakfast, but went round and round the table, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe; nor did he discontinue his circuit even when Julius sat down to breakfast in his turn. His son, as usual, did not seem to see him. Julius had on no collar, his hair was not brushed, and an unkempt moustache hung over his lip. The old man, of course, needed no long time to discover that he had to thank Felgentreu for this fresh misfortune as well; Julius had only shown this weary dislike of work since that "affair." His persistent delicacy as a child was no doubt all part of his more refined tendencies, but now he looked old and ill, and his father felt his heart sink when he cast a sidelong glance at that bloodless, emaciated face. He scarcely ate anything nowadays, only taking for his breakfast black coffee, after which he smoked a cigar.

"You should drop that endless smoking," said the old man, quite unable to contain himself any longer. "It's no good to you, with your heart. And swilling black

coffee isn't any use either; you ought to drink milk rather, and eat something to get up your strength again."

"Keep your reproaches for yourself," Julius retorted curtly, without looking at him.

"I've no need to reproach myself," replied the old man a little sulkily; "at any rate, for nothing but trusting to a sanctimonious fellow who's ruined us all and made us miserable. There you sit now, turned off a good situation, such as you won't easily find the like of again. And certain other folk are having a fine life and taking their pleasure. Divorce! Legal marriage! All that's nice and right, and you, I suppose, will act as a witness at the wedding? It's enough to make a man want to cut his throat."

"Pray don't let anything prevent you," Julius remarked, "and, anyhow, just mind your own business."

"This is my own business," roared the old man. "As long as I have the control of this family my word's law, you understand! I've no call to sit down under your instructions. You've got on well, with your fine education and science, haven't you?"

"At any rate I haven't driven the mother of the family to her death nor ruined my son's health, cheated the State, and spat at an honourable citizen under my own roof when he came to show respect to my dead wife. You may have control, but not of our family; it's controlled by vulgarity. We're all being drowned in your coarseness, so you can leave other people out of your reckoning."

The old man snatched his pipe out of his mouth, and for a moment it looked as if he meant to throw himself on his son. But he sat there, so ill and apathetic, taking a gulp of black coffee and smoking his big black cigar, that even the old man began to have some dim suspicion of his true state, and, after loudly clearing his throat, he took to walking about again. He felt as if every drop of blood in his body had settled in his throat. "I'll break a

blood-vessel some day," he thought in horror. But although he made an effort to grow calm again, he could not shake off a sense of being caught in a noose that was being tightened round his neck. In depressed and faltering tones he began further complaints over bad treatment and misfortune in general and his own life-long honesty and sense of duty in particular, over his desolation now that his life-companion had left him, over the worthlessness of life and men as a whole, seeking refuge at last in all kinds of bloodthirsty pronouncements on the bourgeoisie, and hopes of the vengeance that would one day overwhelm it. Julius, with an air of utter boredom, took up the morning paper and seemed so engrossed in the news that his father stopped in silent discomfiture. He did not notice his son's stealthy longing glances at the cupboard containing the bottle of brandy; he was just about to creep out of the room in utter dejection when Clara came in and provided him with a pretext for a fresh outburst.

"A good thing that I catch sight of you!" he remarked, with his rage flaring up again. "Talebearer! traitress! Maybe I did spit on your Felgentreu's trousers, but you spit in the face of your nearest relatives. How long will it be before he has his little game with you too! But then, I'll cut your throat with a razor, my little dear! *That* you may be sure of!"

Clara glanced at his excited person in silent inquiry, but otherwise went on calmly with her business; she had found out that this was always best in the long run.

"I am no talebearer and Felgentreu no seducer," she replied, a slight flush on her cheeks being her only sign of emotion. "But you can never bear to have peace. A pity you shouldn't stop imagining things that don't exist!"

She began to clear cups and plates from the breakfast-table, whilst the old man watched her attentively.

"Such a sensible, clever girl!" he jeered. "No doubt you think I don't see you making eyes at that fine figure of a man! You can tell that to the marines! Imagine, indeed! Has he betrayed the wife given him by God and the Church, or is it my imagination? Is he living in unlawful sin, or isn't he? Do you want to make me out an idiot? Another word like that and you shall make your father's acquaintance again before his death. And that's what you'll send him to soon enough. I've only one lung to whistle through now; the disgrace to my family has eaten away the other already."

"Most likely it was another disgrace did that," Clara remarked in an undertone.

"What's that you're saying?" her father bellowed. "What are you muttering about? Let's hear what you said, or it'll be the worse for you."

He stepped towards her with upraised hand, and she instinctively held the tray of china in front of her as a shield.

"Understand I'm not going to let myself be hit about by you any more," she declared, firmly meeting his look of fury.

"We'll see about that directly," the old man hissed in his rage, as he tried to catch her with his outstretched hand. "You can go to your Felgentreu to be comforted." But before he could strike her, her flush faded, and she threw the tray and all its contents straight in front of him, so that he stumbled over it and had to seize the corner of the table to save himself from falling. Now whether it was this shock, or the unexpected noise, or the courageous flash in her eyes and all the youthful purity so evident in her attitude, at any rate he changed his mind, although Clara was now defenceless and not even attempting to escape. "I all but broke my neck," he said, scanning her with his dull eyes. "Well, you can get off this time. But I tell you this, my dear: as long as I'm alive you don't

ever cross Felgentreu's threshold. If I notice anything and find out you've been there, all the china in the world won't save you. You don't know me yet. Well, just please yourself!"

Saying this, he left her and, holding himself upright with a great effort, walked slowly and stiffly to his bedroom. He closed the door behind him with a careful deliberation that terrified Clara more than anything else had done.

"There you sit, and say not a word to it all," she said to her brother reproachfully. "I dare say you'd have let your sister be knocked about!"

"Settle your own disputes between yourselves," he retorted, with a shrug of his shoulders and another look in the direction of the brandy-bottle. "How do I know what you're fighting about? From an objective point of view he's in his rights, as he's your father."

As Clara saw his glance and heard his tone, she swallowed her wrath and, after a look that betrayed her feeling of chilly desolation, she stooped down to pick up the broken cups from the floor. No sooner was her back turned than Julius got up, seized the bottle, and uncorked it with a movement of desperate dejection; then he looked for a glass, filled it, and lifted the liquid to his lips. He gulped it down in one draught and, still unrefreshed, filled the glass a second time, with a trembling hand, and again disposed of its contents in the same hasty manner. Then he poured himself out another glassful, but this portion he was going to take with him to drink in his bedroom. At that very moment the bedroom door opened and the old man appeared on the threshold without his cap, in stockinged feet and shirt-sleeves. He had been listening at the door, and the noise brought him out again. When he saw his son occupied like this, he stopped short and, standing motionless, gazed at him with ever-widening eyes and a feeling as though he and the ground on which he stood were both sinking into

some deep abyss. Julius had first looked at him in embarrassment, but then averted his face, and lifted the full glass from the cupboard with apparent indifference; his hand, however, was so unsteady that he spilt part of the spirit and, for some reason abashed or discouraged, he waited, still holding it, and looking down at his moustache. Father and son stood there in a silence that filled the old man's ears with its waves of horror. At last he cleared his throat and, speaking with difficulty in strangely faltering, broken accents, he said: "So that's why my tippie always goes so fast!" And as Julius neither moved nor answered, he continued, with a certain hesitation: "I've so much to answer for. I suppose this is my fault too?"

A short, contemptuous smile appeared on his son's face, and at last, after a pause that seemed an eternity to the old man, he began to walk off with his glass.

"That you must decide yourself!" he remarked, gazing fixedly, almost sternly, straight in front of him. Raising one shoulder a shade, and holding his glass at arm's length, he glided to the door, opened it and disappeared, closing it behind him with the utmost care, just as his father before him had done, but his action seemed even more portentous in its ill-omened mystery than the old man's had done. That day Julius did not come to either dinner or afternoon coffee. He had locked himself in, and refused to have his meals brought to his room, where Clara, whenever she paused in her kitchen occupations, heard him walking restlessly to and fro. Nor did he come out to supper, but by then he had at least stopped that terrifying pacing backwards and forwards. Yet the dead silence struck Clara in the long run as being almost more dreadful. When the old man had left the flat she tried to get into touch with her brother by knocking and speaking at his door, but he never stirred. At last, towards nine o'clock, she both heard and saw him as he crossed

the vestibule. In the bad light he seemed to her terribly ill and miserable, but before she could speak to him he had again disappeared into his room, without deigning even to glance at his sister. He had not yet turned on the light, nor did he do so later. For a long time Clara had a desperate desire to run over quickly to Felgentreu and Alma, but did not dare. In the dark flat, tortured by resentment and anxiety, she went after ten o'clock to her narrow camp-bed in the loft, and drew the clothes over her head to cut off every sight and sound.

How long she had slept she could not tell, but she woke with a start, feeling as if Julius had been standing fully dressed by her bed and had said in slow, mournful tones: "When you see Fräulein Alma again, give her a greeting from me, and tell her I have always loved her." But her little attic was empty, and there was not a sound outside either. A cold shudder passed through her limbs, but she courageously told herself that it was "just foolishness," and at last she managed to fall asleep again. Towards morning—the day was just breaking—she woke again just as suddenly. Now she fancied she had heard something fall heavily in her brother's room too, but again everything was quiet. The clocks were ticking, and one that was wrong in a neighbouring flat struck a quick misleading six o'clock, but soon after the public clocks told her it was only half-past five. Disturbed and wearied too by a bad night, she dropped asleep once more and did not wake again until her father entered the flat on his return.

Lippke had for some considerable time obstinately and carefully avoided his former friend, because he could not now endure the sight of him; but the evening before it seemed to him about time to move on a stage further in his course of action, and he took measures to make it impossible for Felgentreu not to meet him. Yet he had expressly to bar his way, or Emil would never have noticed him, partly on account of the numbers of other

workmen crowding round, but mainly because his mind was entirely preoccupied with Alma's condition. He stopped in some surprise, whilst a cloud crossed his face at the thought of the many bitter memories that this man and he had in common.

"Well, Lippke, how are you now?" he said at last, after the old man had stood some time looking straight at him in dumb defiance. "Are they all well at home? Your coat collar is turned up a little." He politely remedied this little negligence, and then looked at him, patiently waiting for the old man's reply, and still a little self-absorbed.

His calm look and his customary politeness, in addition to a certain "gentlemanly" touch evident in his cool handshake, infuriated the old man more than the most arrogant greeting could have done.

"Excuse me, Herr von Felgentreu, for appearing before you in such poor clothes," he replied, with a tremor of secret rage. "I thank you most gratefully for your kind inquiries. If Clara doesn't soon show signs of your tampering with her, she has apparently nothing else wrong with her health. Julius, kind fellow, is overjoyed that you are going to get your divorce all right and will be able to marry the girl he was engaged to."

His voice broke again, and he hurriedly stuck his pipe in his mouth and began to smoke.

Emil looked at him with a questioning glance, instinctively prepared to see tears begin to rain down this soured, twitching face; but it went no farther than a continued twitching and that painful mingling of emotion and foolish theatrical pose which Lippke always assumed in any crisis; and Felgentreu tried to parry his attack as he replied:

"That's why we've not met for so long, is it?" he said, for the first time slightly resenting the pressure this man tried to put upon him. "You have had misfortune, Anton,

and I am not entirely guiltless in the matter of your wife's death. But the use you make of people. . . ! Well, let's say no more about that. As regards the rest, it seems to me that either Julius authorizes you to speak—in that case I have already told him that I am ready to answer for my conduct to him—or he has not authorized you. What are you demanding from me? Can you state that clearly and precisely?"

His voice was certainly a little sharper now, and Lippke scanned him with a stealthy upward glance.

"Clearly and precisely!" He repeated the words, as if weighing their meaning, whilst he came a step nearer. "You want it clearly and precisely? All right. Julius has stopped going to work and I'm clearly and precisely swilling away my wits. I've had misfortune, do you say?" He scrutinized him for a moment with his cold, ice-grey eyes, and then went on in a lower tone: "See here; my son's found a new joy now, and has made a bride of his bottle. I've done my best for my daughter, threatened her with severe bodily injury if she ever enters your flat again. My dear wife lies in the cool ground; it is well with her. For thirty years I have striven honestly and faithfully to build up my family. In three months you've torn it down. Felgentreu, one thought grows darker and darker in my mind, does not let me sleep nor eat neither. In my desperation I give you warning. Beware of Lippke! There's no trifling with him any longer."

The old man, now pale and shaken by his own warning and its dark and tragic import, fixed his eyes on Felgentreu's face, and saw with satisfaction that he, too, was gradually losing his natural colour. Emil understood that this was a threat of death. For some moments he kept his self-control; then he slowly raised his hand and, with flashing eyes, fumbled strangely, as if he were blind, round about Lippke's chest. Anton's face flamed with a hectic flush; he glanced uneasily at the pale, embittered

features of this honest man, and his mouth remained expectantly open. But then the prophetic finger moved up higher and higher, till Lippke felt himself held fast by the beard. And whilst Emil dragged the shaggy grey growth slowly and solemnly to left and right—Lippke's head following with no attempt at resistance—he said in a low, emphatic tone:

"Man, now I'll say something to you as well. Up till now I have always kept myself in check, and saved you from yourself. If I let you have your own way, you will meet with a defeat from which you will never recover. There, excuse my taking hold of you," he said, in a more conciliatory tone, as he let go of him. "I had no wish to insult you. But I was all at once so terrified. Perhaps I've misunderstood you——"

He stopped in sad silence. Lippke, too, did not speak for some minutes.

"You understood me all right!" he nodded, with his features still distorted. "But you forgot that you should hold an old man's beard in honour. All right! Get your divorce—get married again. Then a day will come to put vengeance into a despairing father's hand. But if you value your life, stop the divorce. I put all the responsibility for future happenings, whether life or death, on your shoulders. Think of Julius!"

He gave Felgentreu no chance to answer. The last workmen coming out of the factory saw him go in, swaying in his triumphant pride, his head thrown back and his face full of prophetic exaltation. Most of them thought he was the worse for drink; some laughed, and one shouted a rough joke after him, but he paid no heed.

He passed the night as in a dream. He felt the greatest satisfaction in the attitude he had taken, and was convinced that it would prove most effective. In his opinion, Felgentreu's only course now would be to prevent the divorce. But the two would certainly soon have enough

of their illicit union and regret it, he especially so, for Lippke looked upon him as the very quintessence of mutability. Consequently he would one day be glad to give up the girl to Julius, who would find ample compensation and good health in the final possession of his heart's love and the 50,000 marks. But the other alternative was not without its charms either. Lippke had laid the matter beforehand on Felgentreu's conscience and made him responsible for whatever might happen. If he persisted in divorce and a fresh marriage, it would, Lippke felt certain, be a heavy blow for Julius, but he himself would take up the proud and unassailable position of righteous avenger. The feeling of his superiority went to his head like wine, so that he passed the night without one drop of alcohol; he never even remembered that he was always provided with spirit, and was astonished to find the bottle in his breast pocket when he began to feel weak towards morning. He emptied it in a fairly short time into his fasting stomach, and left the factory as he had entered it, with staggering feet, head thrown back, his cap pushed right off his forehead, and glassy eyes. The porter, to whom he gave his tallies, looked at him in surprise and drew his own conclusions. The old man noticed no one, jostled in his half-drunken gaiety against people without knowing it, and was paying no attention, when at the outside gate he knocked against someone who seemed to be barring his way, and it was not until he looked up, all ready with an oath or a joke, that he noticed it was Felgentreu. There he was before him, as if he had sprung from the ground, grave, unslept, anxious. Lippke attempted by a great effort of will to overcome his drunkenness, but in vain, and he stood helpless, awaiting the outcome of this meeting. "I'm not the worse for liquor, whatever you may think," he muttered, still somewhat cowed, but then relapsed, with a sigh, into silence.

"Then you are able to listen to me," Emil remarked, overcoming with difficulty his secret repulsion. "I should be sorry to have to consider the matter again. I have told Alma that you will be in great peril if we carry through the divorce. You can say to your son that, at the first hearing this week, I shall deny the charge. I have no influence with Meta. Don't hope for anything more than what I say, for I should never give up Alma, even apart from the fact that she will soon give birth to my own child. After this all intercourse between you and me can cease. Morning!"

The old man woke at last from his alcoholic stupor, but Felgentreu was already lost amongst the crowd of workmen in the factory yard. Others pushed past him, but he barely noticed it. Almost thunderstruck, he began to move on, making well-nigh heroic efforts to give the matter calm and cool consideration. When he reached home he was so absorbed in thought that it never occurred to him "to kick up a row" because Clara was still in bed. Until breakfast was ready he walked up and down his bedroom, thinking and puzzling over what had just happened, until he had got it all plain before his eyes. He drank his coffee without a word, and still further revived under the influence of its warmth and stimulating effect. Julius, who seemed to feel a little better to-day, observed him with a passing glance or two. Meanwhile the old man began to talk.

"Well, as regards our friend Felgentreu," he began, with almost poetic inspiration, "I've nonplussed him now, Julius. I've got such a hold over him that he has given me his oath this morning that the divorce shan't come to anything. Everything is to bide as it is. We've known his tricks, grand gentleman and noble character that he is, this long while. The licentious crew, where never a one knows who his father is—the whole sweet-hearting lot of them—they'll hear something different on the Judgment Day."

Julius seemed to be listening with something like interest, for instead of his usual contemptuous rebuke to such eloquence, he suddenly took part in the conversation with a sickly smile and replied, when Clara had gone out of the room: "Well, father, you haven't been such a clean liver yourself, have you? No doubt you took what chance came your way."

"Chances that came my way?" the old man fumed. "What else should I do? No one can stifle his natural needs. But I kept my house and family as they should be. I was a faithful servant of the Prussian Government and the conscientious father of a family; nobody can say aught else, and that's what decides the verdict, not how often you had a bit of diversion."

"How many times a month did you have your diversion, I wonder?" Julius said, as if to himself, whilst his fingers played with a knife.

His terrible smile and the generous information that followed on the old man's part filled the next few minutes with some sort of mutual understanding, but then Julius, with a touch of his former aversion, exclaimed with impatient contempt:

"Well, be that as it may, I certainly didn't authorize you to take any steps as regards that divorce. I absolutely deny any responsibility in the matter. From an objective and moral point of view, Herr Felgentreu has perfect liberty to act as he chooses. Who wants you to play the heavy father here? You'll do a mischief that you'll never be able to justify."

The old man was at first rather taken aback by this turn in the conversation, but began his eager talk again, defending his course of action and abusing Felgentreu. He felt it essential to his very life that things should remain as they were, and considered it a clear point of honour that his opponents should make no change of any kind.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Felgentreu appeared at the first hearing of his divorce case, he was most unfavourably impressed by the whole procedure there, which seemed to him more like that of a market than the administration of justice.

Lawyers, in their gowns, crowded chattering round the bench. He was furious at the utter want of sympathy or consideration in the way young women were cross-examined on sexual points; he saw such unseemly handling of matters requiring tact as he could never have believed had he not heard it with his own ears and seen the helpless blushes of the victims. In the end he was so furious that he stepped before the presiding judge and, as a protest against such mishandling of human affairs, began arguing as soon as the facts of his case were read out.

"Wait!" the judge remarked, turning over the papers of another case, whilst the clerk continued his indifferent reading of Emil's.

"What is there to wait for?" Felgentreu retorted good-humouredly. "There is no point in it. I deny everything from first to last, so the court need not waste its time."

The presiding judge looked at him in annoyance.

"You would do well to hold your tongue until you are asked." He spoke somewhat more sharply and with an undertone of contempt that enraged Emil even more, and was again returning to his study of the various cases when Emil interposed once more.

"If you summoned me here only to hold my tongue, I could have done that as well at home," he declared. "I thought I was here to speak out."

"Silence now!" the judge ordered sharply, "or I'll punish you for contempt of court and postpone your case."

"I doubt if that lies within your power," Felgentreu replied, with silent wrath. "I am here to speak. Why should I be quiet?"

A moment's silence followed, during which the two men measured one another attentively. There was something in the big fair man's frankness of speech that made an impression on the Government official and warned him to strike another note. His sour red face did not lose any of its severity, it is true, but Emil's protest modified his arrogant contempt of men from the lower classes, and to the amazement of all lawyers present he said quietly:

"You will now pay three marks' fine for contempt of court; then you will wait until your case has been read through, when I will inform you what I wish to hear from you."

This alteration in his treatment made a certain impression on Felgentreu as well. He paid, and kept silence whilst the clerk finished reading his case and the judge turned over a few others. The after-proceedings then went *on fairly fast and without further friction. Emil, when questioned, denied all charges, to the great surprise of the two lawyers conducting the case. The judge, too, lifted his head with a look of greater attention, and pointed out to Felgentreu that in this case objections would be made. The legal papers, which he asked for, showed, as he pointed out, that the defendant had a different place of residence from the plaintiff. Did Felgentreu intend, then, to return to her? At last the lawyers, in spite of his resistance, managed to get his defence narrowed down to a denial of adultery but an admission of criminal desertion. In great indignation at this crafty procedure, which frustrated his actual intention, he left the court. His own counsel afterwards explained to him why this course had been necessary, since the law forbade the marriage of the parties concerned if their identity became known, which would have been inevitable had objections been raised to the divorce, etc.*

Alma listened silently to his report at home that the

application for divorce had not been dismissed, and that Lippke would now look upon him as a hypocrite and a liar. Her physical condition and consequent melancholy, combined with those forebodings of death that torment so many women before their first confinement, began to occupy her mind to an ever greater degree, so that other questions gradually seemed of less and less importance.

Emil thought long and deeply as to whether he should tell old Lippke the result of his action or not. In the first place, however, he did not want to have anything more to do with him, and secondly, he had done all that lay in his power to keep his word, so he decided to let the matter follow its natural course. He was weary to death of all this strife, and in spite of all his magnanimous efforts to fight it down, a certain grudge had gradually taken root in his heart against those Lippke men, who knew no moderation in their demands and could neither live nor die as honest men should.

Moreover, a few days later, another letter came from Meta, addressed this time to Felgentreu:

DEAR EMIL (she began),

What are you doing? My lawyer writes me that you are denying adultery. Do you want to bring us one and all to utter misery? Either you are my husband and come back to me, or you belong to another woman, and acknowledge the charge of adultery to make divorce possible. It seems that criminal desertion is not sufficient. Should I persist in my plea of adultery, protests will be made if I am to get my freedom. Names will have to be given, and that means no possibility of marriage for you two. Reconsider the matter carefully. I should be glad to get it settled and have peace. What am I to do?

Yours, META.

He at once sat down to answer her. For the first time he, too, felt the shadow of an impending fate. Instead of "freeing" himself, he had become involved in tragic complications, and already he began to consider whether he should not induce the woman he loved to emigrate

with him and leave behind all these restrictions of the Old World.

DEAR META (he wrote in some vexation),

I do not know, either, what you had better do. Old Lippke tells me that Julius does nothing but sit at home and drink. At the moment, he gives me my choice either to prevent the divorce or he will not answer for the consequences. One thought only possesses him day and night. He does not look very reassuring. If I was only afraid for myself it might not matter so much, but it is the thought of other lives that makes me uneasy. Write to me if I should face this responsibility, then I shall know whether you are to get your freedom or not.

As always,

Your EMIL.

To this Meta answered shortly:

DEAR EMIL,

You are now of age, or should be, so you must make your own decisions as regards your life. If you are in any difficulty, talk it over with your friend, and if your friend cannot help you, lay the matter before God. My only duty now is to act for myself. In what way I intend to do this you will hear later.

META.

Alma, for her part, felt a far greater aversion to the Lippkes than did Emil. She constantly thought in gloomy discontent of this dislike, which was always smouldering in her innermost heart, and saw with uneasiness that not only the money and control of it, but even ordinary security of life, was slipping away into dark uncertainty whilst she could only look on in helpless despair. When Clara came in again one evening after supper, Alma gave Lippke's daughter but a peevish, almost cold, reception, although she knew what a risk this girl was running to make this visit. To relieve her pent-up feelings, Clara soon began to speak of her brother's condition, and then went on to mention how terribly like he had lately become to his mother just before her death. Without his moustache

and the red rims to his eyelids the likeness would have been quite startling, almost as if he were her reincarnation. She did not seem to have even the slightest idea of any connection between his illness and Alma's broken troth, but, in spite of that, Alma heard all these communications with repugnance, and suddenly, in a voice of great annoyance, begged Clara to spare her such tales for the future. Then she wept bitter tears of remorse, and Clara wept with her. Felgentreu, who all the time had been walking silently up and down, tried to take advantage of Alma's softened mood to bring about a reconciliation, but she was not prepared for that.

"I know you two are on very good terms," she answered shortly, and with more bitter hostility than Emil had ever heard before from her lips. After such a result, he let the subject drop, and for a short time they continued to sit together sadly enough, talking of less dangerous topics until Clara could take her leave without making her hosts feel that any offence had been given.

That evening Emil first mentioned to Alma the possibility of emigration. He was himself inwardly excited and under the infection of Alma's depressed and gloomy outlook on life; he felt surrounded by difficulties, moral doubt, sickness, and danger of death—all of them things for which he had as great a natural antipathy as for the chilly November days.

He now held forth—as a sequel to earlier orations—on the consequences of unnatural social conditions, which deprived the majority of human beings of the essentials of existence, and on a class cleavage that poisoned and embittered all human relations. As he spoke, his mind reverted to Lippke, whom he considered the victim of such conditions. He looked upon himself as the man chosen by Lippke to serve as the object upon whom to vent all his pent up class hatred, and all these reflections tended to have a paralysing effect upon his natural

optimism and to replace it by silent terror, shattering his faith in human goodness and stifling his disinterested longing for beauty and harmony. For the moment Alma said nothing to his new views, nor could she be induced to give any expression of her opinion later on, so that Felgentreu, who by now had gained great insight into her character, guessed that she was meditating opposition, and that he might find a possible enemy in her as regarded this fresh proposal of his. As it was really a question of liberty for him, he could not view such a possibility without a certain degree of anxiety.

CHAPTER XX

OLD Lippke was intent on reviving his son's strength, and his efforts in this direction took up much of his time and thought just then. The former he spent hanging round the big druggists' windows, making a mental note of new remedies, their names, and the virtues they were said to possess. Afterwards he would try to talk to Julius about their composition, method of use, and reliability, and this he repeated until he was certain that his son had assimilated—even if with nervous contempt—the information provided. Morning after morning he read the papers through in search of vacancies for chemists, and when one day a dispenser was needed in Bernau, he tried to paint in the very brightest colours for Julius the advantage of a provincial town in the Mark, the better position he would take there, the healthier climate, etc. He also tried to point out to him the desirability of a post as manager in a branch druggist's shop. But then Julius gave him a piece of his mind.

"You chatter and chatter, and haven't the least idea what you are talking about! What do you know about

these subjects? Objectively nothing. Only a man with experience would be chosen as manager of a druggist's branch shop. Am I a druggist?"

Much taken aback, the old man was anxious to prove that Julius was much more than that; since he understood an apothecary's work, he must also understand a druggist's business, which was only on a lower grade.

"Lower grade yourself!" and the exclamation showed the depth of his scorn. "I suppose you think, as the Emperor is superior to a tailor, that he can make suits of clothes as well."

This comparison seemed so crushing to old Lippke that he fell into a discomfited and troubled silence.

For more than a month now Julius had been sitting at home in melancholy idleness; for the last fortnight he had not set foot outside the door. He had not made any attempt at all to get another situation. To his father, who never once in his life—with the exception of his wedding-day and that on which he had buried his wife—had voluntarily taken an hour's holiday, for even at the end of his career as railway brakesman he had gone straight from his last evening train, without one backward glance, to begin his first night as factory watchman—to his father, then, Julius's conduct seemed not only inexplicable and worrying, but decidedly wrong as well. The great intellect and education of this son of his made him afraid to make a fuss and use his power as master of the house to drive Julius back to work; moreover, he began to have other ideas about this solemn, pale form—ideas that, in their secret horror, became more pronounced and emphatic with every passing day. By degrees he grew to look upon Julius as the innocent victim of his love and of the arrogant pride of others, and as such he began almost literally to watch over him and to regard him with increasing respect.

With eyes full of reverence and a kind of fierce tender-

ness in his manner, he would hover round him without a word, watch over him, push all the best bits on to his plate—an attention Julius never noticed—and since he found it impossible to refrain from his schnaps altogether, he at any rate diluted it with a liberal admixture of water, so that it should not be so bad for Julius.

All these attentions, however, were but the ineffectual attempts of an old man, already tottering to the grave himself, to delay, and if possible avert, a fresh fate that had already started on its path of destruction. Julius was plainly fading away, and just as he gradually developed a disturbing outward resemblance to his mother, so in other respects, quite unnoticed by all around him, he was quietly but persistently treading the same path which her feet had followed to another world.

His unobtrusive symptoms of silent despair—all of them more the result of outward suggestion than of natural inclination—his smoking, drinking of drams and vast quantities of black coffee, his hermit life in his room, without either exercise or fresh air, ended at last by destroying all his power of effective resistance to that bitterness which is present in the life and nature of all mortals to help them develop their instinct of self-preservation. This instinct was fast dying in him, and giving place to a dangerous desire to have done with it all. Instinctively he began to dwell continually on thoughts of death, a little uneasily at first, but soon more and more as a matter of course, almost as a consolation. His hopeless disappointment in love was still too deep and overwhelming to allow room for any sense of fear. In addition, his heart now beat with the utmost irregularity and gave him almost constant pain. He was losing flesh in a terrible way; there were deep hollows round his eyes; his ears stood far out from his head; his moustache seemed scarcely to belong to his face, but to hang in the air below his thin nose, whilst his cheek-bones projected above his

shrunken features. Lately he had left off shaving, too, and the reddish stubble encircling his pale face gave him an indescribably neglected appearance. His hair was also far too long, and his moustache quite unkempt. For weeks now he had given up wearing a collar, and as he no longer buttoned his shirt, his bony chest and poor outstanding ribs on either side were fully exposed to view. He always slouched about in slippers. One day, when the old man took the law into his own hands and sent for the doctor, Julius locked his door and kept it so, regardless of all his father's knocks, remonstrances and even abuse, until the medical man had taken his departure—indeed, for hours after he stayed suffering and angry in his wretched hiding-place. Afterwards he overwhelmed his father with such a flood of bitter and insulting reproaches as to insure himself against any repetition of such an attempt, and the old man nearly wept with rage and distress over his only son and heir, who insisted so obstinately on slipping away from life.

But even his family did not realize how weak Julius really was. He made an effort to walk the few steps to the table and back to get his meals, but the rest of his time he passed lying on his bed, so that when he took to it entirely, it did not seem nearly so serious as it really was, especially as he pleaded a chill at first, and always had a book in his hand when anyone entered the room; but as soon as he was alone he let it drop with an apathetic gesture, and shut the tired eyes that betrayed to anyone with keener sight his utter weariness of the world and all it offered.

Only the thought of his love and the object of his affection still kept their old place in his heart, and their never-fading radiance—indeed, as the end drew nearer, Alma's dear form assumed a well-nigh religious significance by an offering which he had laid at her feet. In his pocket-book lay a will that he had made one night lately on his sick-bed, in which he absolutely and in

calmly acquiesced in the coming change. As in a dream, he saw the already fading forms of his past life appear by his bed, and disappear again without making any impression on him. He barely noticed how vainly his lungs fought for breath, how intermittent was the beating of his pulse, and how heavy the lethargy of his dying limbs; even with the greatest effort he could barely get them to move, in the hope of still deceiving those around him as to his true condition. Then, when the doctor came after all, he had no idea of it at first. He took him for his father, and then addressed him as Felgentreu. After an injection had been given him, he revived, and showed by an attentive, observant glance that he knew what was going on. The sun was shining into the room and children were playing somewhere outside. The doctor spoke to his father and sister in tones of quiet disapproval whilst he was emptying his syringe into Julius's arm. As Clara sat there in tears, and the old man turned on the doctor with a flash like lightning in his ice-grey eyes, Julius was still able to say in a clear, distinct voice: "They couldn't know." At the same time he bethought himself that he could not trust his father and, as if to get witnesses, he said with emphasis: "My will is in my pocket-book." But it was evident that these words exhausted his last remaining strength. He sank again into the stupor that always seemed to him the personification of his mother. With a sigh he sank into it as easily and willingly as into a white, well-shaken feather-bed, and from that moment he was lost to all earthly ties.

For three days he lay there in a silence only broken at rare intervals by a whisper to his mother. Scarcely anything passed his lips; he struggled against the injections, which hurt and disturbed him, and these the doctor discontinued, as he saw that they were no longer of any avail. The night he died it was raining and a thunderstorm was breaking over a distant part of Berlin. Now and

then there came the muffled sound of far-off thunder, and from time to time a pale flash of lightning lit up the room. The whole night through he struggled with parted lips for breath, until he gave a last sigh, towards four o'clock. For a short time after he lay motionless, with hanging jaw, and Clara, keeping faithful watch beside him, thought all was over, when he uttered one more little sigh, and then with a strangely peaceful expression closed his mouth as if to say: "Objectively released."

CHAPTER XXI

WITHIN the next few days the postman again pushed a paper through the slit in the Felgentreu's door, to bring news of another bereavement. Anton and Clara Lippke announced, on a large sheet of black-edged paper, with deep distress, the premature death of their son and brother. Alma read it without a sound, then in silent wrath, and pale with fear and repugnance, passed the notification on to Emil; nor did she refer to it afterwards, although she shivered with cold, and went to bed early because she had an attack of pain. Emil watched for some time at her bedside in distressful self-examination that lasted after he had gone to bed until morning came once more. They both spent a sleepless night, tormented with the sad thought of human frailty. Felgentreu bore his suffering with dignity and resignation to the inevitable. Alma, with secret resentment, feared further misfortunes, and by degrees began to watch secretly to see what would be Felgentreu's attitude in this matter when once the night was over. With a kind of subdued satisfaction that was certainly not joy, scarcely even content, she heard him say that they must send a wreath and a card of condolence, and there he let the matter rest. But she made

another test of his readiness to meet her wishes and asked to go out this very evening. He only raised a little objection on account of her health and her want of sleep the night before, and then took her with great care and well wrapped up to the cinema, where she wanted to see the new sensational film, *For Love's dear Sake*. She had read about it in the newspaper, and something or other in it reminded her of her experience with Julius. Her cheeks flushed with excitement; she followed it intently to the very last; in some places she shed a few silent tears. All the next day she began to doubt and speculate again, until she had thought out another test of Emil's love. As she remembered his persistent refusal to go to church with Meta, she asked him on the third morning, which was a Sunday, to take her to service. As she watched him with a sidelong glance, he noticed the strained look in those eyes, that now always showed some trace of coming or recent tears, and by the never-failing insight of his affection he understood its cause, and said he was ready to go. He put on his black coat, that was only worn on occasions of ceremony, and Alma her dark frock, and thus they went to church together. Once there, Felgentreu, it is true, saw little from his seat but that one loved face, now showing due self-control, almost indeed to the point of severity, and which in all the dignity of coming motherhood she kept fixed first on the altar and then on the pulpit. As she did so, she was sensible that Felgentreu never took his eyes off her, and experienced a sad and serious joy in this fact, as a sweet though bitter proof of her own reality, the only reality that she could feel still existed for her when viewed by the stern light of her moral consciousness. She had nothing left but him; her life now lay in his hand—a thought that gave her a disturbing sense of the narrow limits of her life's horizon. For a moment she remembered that Julius was to be buried that afternoon. She did not dwell on the thought,

however, but with that practical spirit which is so constant a feature of the Lutheran faith, and which had been familiar to her since her confirmation, she concentrated all her attention on the preacher's words. At last the blessing was pronounced, and she definitely appropriated a portion of this for her child. Felgentreu left all his for his beloved, and was, moreover, pleased when the organ began the last voluntary, for that was more in his line. Neither of them had noticed the stately figure of an older woman, who, with her large grey eyes full of loneliness and unsolved problems, watched them leave the church; then, with firmly closed lips and slightly bowed shoulders, she went out of the building through another door.

But Alma came home from church no more kindly disposed to her fellow-men, with the exception of her husband, for the memory of the fresh blow to her happiness was still too keen for that. Even her love for her husband had a strong touch of jealousy about it, as he seemed so full of sympathy with Clara, and evidently worried, too, with misgivings as to what might ensue, since he began again to speak of emigration.

She felt he was quite likely to leave Europe. He was sick of his native land, of mankind in general, and his changed home-life had not as yet so steadied him that his heart could rest in it as in some sure refuge. Alma felt this with a self-reproachful sense of her own guilt in the matter and grief for him. But as he dwelt continuously on his plans, talking as if the whole world was almost too small for him, and as if he was already creeping on hands and knees to stalk his prey through the impenetrable forests bordering the farm he meant to have, she told him once and for all her opinion.

"If you no longer like being here," she said disconsolately, as if to herself, with a gentleness that was quite unheard-of in her, "of course, no one will keep you. It is

not all very pleasant, of course, for a man who loves liberty, and I myself, supposing I was a man, might perhaps not care to put up with it either. Out there, no doubt, it is much livelier. Do exactly what you feel inclined."

Greatly surprised at her tone, he fixed his eyes on her face; she did not return his glance, however, but looked sadly straight in front of her, whilst he caught sight of a tear hanging on her eyelashes, and hailed it as a sign of wonderful tenderness.

"But, Alma dear," he exclaimed, simply for the sake of saying something, "I'm not talking only about myself. Of course, you are to come with me, my sunbeam that you are. Why, what should I do over there without you? You see that, don't you? You, the child, a dog, a couple of goats and unlimited nature, these I thought would make life bearable. In front the vast ocean, behind us perhaps a volcano, with its cloud of smoke by day and its pillar of fire by night. Wild beasts may roar in those primeval forests, but there is safety and comfort behind our palisade. And in our new liberty we shall look back on the old world as on an aching tooth that has gone. Can't you picture it to yourself, Alma dearest?"

She sat for a little in sorrowful silence, and then asked reproachfully: "And where would you send the children to school? No, no," and a shake of the head showed how incapable she was of sharing his enthusiasm. "I should die of fright over there. Why, only to hear you talk of wild beasts——"

"Then you'll face that business with old Lippke," he asked, with a troubled smile, "and the ghosts of the old world?"

But she took refuge in silence again, and feeling not very sure of his ground, he dropped this aspect of the question. "Of course, it needn't be a forest in Further India," he went on. "I could get a good post in England." But as far as he himself was concerned, this proposal

lacked the attractive prospect of liberty offered by the other, and he, too, grew silent and absorbed in thought.

Late that Sunday afternoon, after the funeral, as soon as ever the bereaved father had gone to his night-work again, Clara once more dropped into the Felgentreu's flat like some poor homeless bird. She could no longer endure her own home, was quite overcome with misery and loneliness, and felt that even if her friend had no kind word for her, she could rely on Felgentreu's generosity. Emil, who went to the door at her ring, expecting to see her, gave her his usual brotherly welcome.

"This has been a hard day for you," he said sympathetically. "Now you must have a rest here."

"Why didn't you come for a minute or two?" she asked, with fresh tears, as she took off her hat. "I had longed so terribly for some living soul."

"Child," he answered gravely, "my place now is here. A man cannot tear himself in two, and there are times that everyone has to go through alone."

With a kindly gesture he helped her off with her jacket. "You are cold, too," he went on, as he noticed her shiver. "Come along; we have a nice warm room. You can sit down beside Alma; there is no getting her away from the stove."

The experiences Clara had just gone through had aged her and plainly made her more of a woman. Alma welcomed the pretty girl not unkindly, but with a certain outward reserve as well as an inner shudder, and at once upset Felgentreu's arrangements by giving Clara a chair by the stove and commanding him to sit down by her. Even at that distance she noticed with fear and repulsion the smell of death from Clara's hair and garments, under the influence of the heat from the stove. Much upset, and suffering horribly in the presence of one who was the actual sister of one of those dreaded dead, she began a broken conversation with her. Clara, enjoying the warmth,

went back to Felgentreu's last remark, and said she could not help being cold lately, as her father would not allow any fires to be lit yet, and the windows of the room where the body had lain had anyway to be kept open day and night.

"But why do you keep your dead so long in the house?" Alma asked a little aggressively. "Nowadays they are all taken at once to the cemetery chapel."

"Yes, that's what I told father." Clara's voice was sad and a little surprised as well. "But he listened to nothing all the time, and never answered, only marched round and round the living-room table and then strode off to Julius. He would stare at his face for a time and then back into the parlour. Besides, most of the time he was drunk," she added in an undertone. "One never knows for certain where he won't be. Yes, yes, those were dreadful days!" Her sobs broke out afresh. "And not a soul came to the house."

A short silence followed. Two bright red spots appeared on Alma's cheeks, that were nowadays rather pale as a rule. Emil noticed them not without anxiety, whilst Clara shed her silent tears. All of them felt that the dead man was passing through the room.

"All his life there was something secretive about him," Clara declared mournfully, "and he died in just the same secret way. He worshipped you as a saint!" She turned to Alma with the shake of her head that was constantly occurring to-day. "One night, when his illness had already begun, he came to my room and said in such a sad voice: 'Greet Fraulein Alma from me, and tell her I have always loved her!' Such devotion you will never get again."

Alma was almost overcome as she again caught that invisible aroma of death, and saw before her eyes the image of the dead surrounded by an atmosphere of darkness and almost unbearable reproach. But she firmly

closed her lips and uttered not a sound as long as Clara continued to speak of her brother. However, she asked Felgentreu for a cigarette, which she smoked persistently, partly to counteract those death-like fumes and partly to have something to do. Felgentreu was the only one to utter an occasional word of sympathy or encouragement. Since Alma did not seem to think of it, he got up once to make some tea, but Alma at once called out a nervous inquiry as to what he was doing so long in the kitchen. Being alone with her friend filled her with such a horrible sense of terror that she longed like a child for the comfort of his fair head. Suddenly, however, as a sort of defence against the ghosts of the dead, she began to talk about the divorce.

"Emil has been this week to the session of the court and tried to oppose the divorce," she remarked in a reproachful tone to Clara. "He denies that he has gone off with another woman, but he cannot deny intentional desertion, or he would have to go back to his first wife, and that, of course, is out of the question. You can tell your father this. Emil has done all he could, although he is under no obligation to you at all. What does your father imagine, I wonder? Now most likely he'll abuse and threaten Emil and denounce him as a liar. But you mustn't put up with that any longer." She turned in entreaty to Emil. "The more you yield, the more they will demand of you."

Clara exchanged a startled look with Felgentreu, and instinctively put her hand on her heart. On her little finger shone a narrow gold ring that Alma had given her at her confirmation, in the spring-time of their friendship. The money for it had come from Felgentreu.

"But, Alma—who are you talking about?" she said in horrified tones before Emil could reply. "It is horrible enough already—the whole quarrel and the injustice. Why are you all at once against me like this, Alma dear,

my only friend? Have I ever done anything to hurt you or your Felgentreu?"

"Anything to hurt Felgentreu? Yes!" Alma angrily replied. "Why did you tell him all this about Julius? What has it to do with him? In other words you meant: See, this is what you have driven him to. I've been expecting such suggestions. I will not endure them under my own roof. Do you hear?"

"Come now, Alma, you are going too far!" Felgentreu suggested, gently taking her hand. She pulled it away sharply, and put it under the wrap she was wearing. "Listen," he went on kindly, "Clara never meant any such thing; you know her well enough to be sure of that. As we are her only friends, she thinks she can say out what she feels here. No good comes, either, of returning injustice for injustice. Anyone with a good heart like yours only hurts himself by that."

"Oh, is that it? You are putting me on a level now with your Lippke!" and she trembled as she spoke. "I am unjust because I am angry for your sake, but Lippke you can pity because he spits on your trousers. The man ought to be put under control; he is a source of public danger," she went on fiercely. "That's what I say! Maybe I am bad, and have a degenerate nature, who knows? But I can't stand it any longer. I have done these people no wrong. I made no promise. Why do they persecute me with their man who is fretting himself to death because he fancies Heaven knows what? What need has she to bring this smell of death into our flat? Let her go. This smell and the black clothes will drive me mad. O God! O God! Oh, help me, Emil. Don't you forsake me too! No, no; I'll go to bed." She drew herself up with his help, trembling in every limb. "O God! how they all torment me! Can one never have a little joy?" With her eyes filled with the darkness of irrepressible suffering, she said to her amazed friend: "Perhaps you will come again later." And with an

effort at self-mastery she added: "When you no longer bring the smell and look of death with you." And with another shudder she turned her eyes hastily away, hesitated miserably for a second or two, and then with a sigh and tearless sob crept away to her bedroom, leaning on Felgentreu's shoulder.

Clara remained behind quite incapable of moving. From the inner room she heard with deep sympathy how the friend who had just repudiated her bewailed her condition, condemned her character, heard her shiver, express her fears for Felgentreu, complain of sickness, and amongst all else ask about Clara. As Felgentreu replied that she was still sitting in the next room, Alma grew silent. Immediately afterwards he came out himself, and begged her in quite his usual voice not to go till he could see her off. He went into the kitchen, and used the kettle he had put on, not to make tea, but to fill hot bottles, that seemed to ease Alma with their warmth. In ten minutes he came back with the news that she was asleep.

"Now she won't wake again till about daylight," he remarked. "She always sleeps like a top all through the night."

"I suppose I ought to be going?" Clara asked sadly. "Yes, yes, I'll go now. But I've such a horror of going back into that empty flat. Alma cannot be more afraid of us than I am of it," she said, with a shake of her head. "As long as father was there at night it wasn't so bad. I believe I'll do myself a mischief."

He laid his hand on her shoulder, as a big brother might have done. "You'll not do that, Clara," he said in a kindly encouraging tone. "You see, you've no reason for it. Trust in God! To fight your horror, say a heartfelt prayer to Him for your brother who has gone and for your father, whose trouble is greater than yours. Happier times will come for you, but for him life is over. Now, too, you might with a good conscience peep a little more often

into your looking-glass without doing any harm. It will show you your youthful charm, and when you've grasped what you are like, your loneliness will go, and its place will be taken by confidence and joy of life. Then that means the beginning of many good things, believe me."

Greatly attracted by his words, Clara seized his hand gratefully, with a feeling that was something more than sisterly affection, but shyly let it drop again as she remembered that he belonged to Alma, and said with a sigh of utter desolation:

"I am an outcast and all alone. God helps the great folk and does not trouble about such poor girls as me. My mother and brother have got away from the misery of it all. As to my father—what will come of him I don't know. With things like this, only human help is any good to me, not prayer nor a looking-glass."

She looked at him with a sad smile. In the light of the staircase lamp—for they were already outside the flat—a strange, mysterious attraction seemed hidden in the folds of her black dress. Tear-drops, golden with reflected brightness and shining like a child's, yet with a seductive womanly charm of their own, hung suspended from her eyes. Youth strove with maturity in the fine lines of her figure. The lace on her garments that peeped out through her open jacket made a strong appeal to him, as an eloquent witness of her health and innocence, although her greatest attraction in his eyes was her loneliness and her budding womanhood, so evident in the mingled indecision and instinctive knowledge of her every movement.

He noticed admiringly all this, that had been non-existent at her last visit, and said involuntarily:

"Some day you will make a great impression on men, Clara, rest assured of that. All this sadness will drop from you, and then all at once there will emerge a charming young woman, whom many will try to win. But then, don't throw yourself away, do you hear? Remember me,

and that I have been the first to warn you of what was coming."

"There won't be one of them like you," she said in a tone of sorrowful doubt.

She was still looking at him, and as he gave no answer, she offered him her lips with a silent, pleading gesture. Felgentreu, carried away by her devotion, stooped and kissed her. Her warm, full lips returned his kiss with heartfelt emotion. But just as he was beginning to wonder at the self-assurance and vitality that was suddenly springing forth from her silent desolation, she tore herself away from him—all this had happened in the dark street, just outside the front door of the building—and immediately after she was hastening with tripping steps down past the houses, and disappeared from view without once looking back.

"There, now she has started too!" he murmured, as with a sigh of relief he turned back into the house. And with a satisfied nod he added: "A good girl! Take what you need from me, but misuse and abuse I cannot allow. For it is not only a child that is on its way for me, but dignity and responsibility. That's where the new life lies, Emil!"

He hung about on the steps, deep in thought and wonder, until the light went out. Then he went up to his flat and let himself in. Until long after midnight he sat engrossed in new ideas and useful meditation, gazing by the shaded light of the bedside lamp at the peacefully breathing form of his heart's love and the future mother of his child, and when he did at last prepare to go to bed, he had for ever left childish things behind him and become a man in very deed. It is true, the old restless desire for change still murmured and stirred in his heart, but Alma's love of her native soil had conquered in the main, and under the common-sense pressure of her opposition, which came with all the strength of some force